On the Eve of our Founder-Chancellor's Birthday 2024

" THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO ARE UNTRANSLATABLE. "

Dr Taslima Nasrin

Controversial Feminist

"Let humanity be the other name for religion "

Department of English

Dr. M.G.R.
EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE
DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY
University with Graded Autonomy Status
(An ISO 21001 : 2018 Certified Institution)
Periyar E.V.R. High Road, Maduravoyal, Chennai-95. Tamilnadu, India.

Dr Taslima Nasrin

Controversial Feminist

Compiled by :

Dr LS Shanthi MA MEd MPhil PhD
Principal
SMDPVC Nursery and Primary School

Prof Dr S Ramalingam
Joint-Registrar—Languages

TOI
LINE OF NO CONTROL
SANDEEP ADHWARYU
DIDI, MY CREATIVE FREEDOM HAS BEEN DESTROYED BY...
...THESE BIGOTED PATRIARCHAL HOUNDS...
...STATE'S COMPLICITY HAS LEFT ME HELPLESS
DON'T WORRY PADMAVATI, YOU ARE WELCOME TO W BENGAL
PADMAVATI?! THIS IS TASLIMA NASRIN

Department of English

Dr. M.G.R.
EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE
DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY
University with Graded Autonomy Status
(An ISO 21001 : 2018 Certified Institution)
Periyar E.V.R. High Road, Maduravoyal, Chennai-95. Tamilnadu, India.

Dr Taslima Nasrin

Controversial Feminist

All rights are reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system (including but not limited to computers, disks, external drives, electronic or digital devices, e-readers, websites), or transmitted in any form or by any means (including but not limited to cyclostyling, photocopying, docutech of other reprographic reproductions, mechanical, recording, electronic, digital versions) without the prior written permission of the publisher, not be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

September 2024

Published by:

Department of English
Dr MGR Educational and Research Institute
[Deemed to be University]
Maduravoyal, Chennai - 600 095

Funded by:

Na Subbu Reddiar 100 Educational Trust
AD-13, 5th Street, Anna Nagar West, Chennai—600 040

978-81-972782-8-0

Printed at:
DJ Printers, Chennai – 600 095

Contents

TASLIMA NASRIN

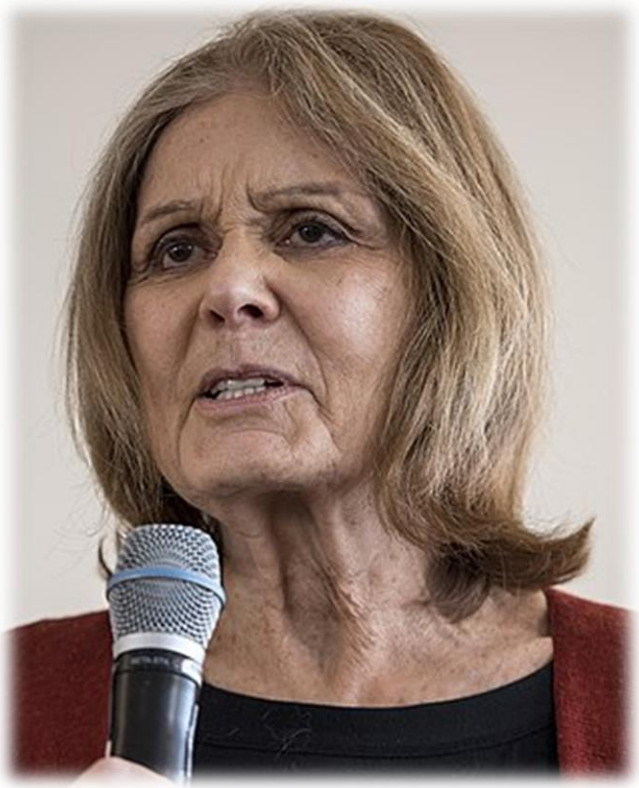
https://www.taslimanasrin.com/

https://www.britannica.com/biography/Taslima-Nasrin

S.No.	Chapters	Page
1	Videos >>> TN [22 Videos]	1
2	Biography: TN	6
3	Narrated TIMELINE	13
4	TWO Interviews	19
5	Awards received	34
6	Enigmatic Taslima Nasrin	36
7	LAJJA (Shame) >>> Book + Review	39
8	Catalogue of BOOKS	50
9	Banned Books of TN	61
10	A Controversial Feminist	65
11	21 Feminists in 21st Century	94
12	Quotes of Taslima Nasrin	103
13	Cartoons >>>TN	109
14	Photos & Images	121
15	Selected THIRTEEN articles on her Works	134

Dedication

Gloria Steinem



25 Mar 1934 >>> Age: 90

FOREWORD

"I believe religion is not compatible with human rights, women's rights, or freedom of expression."

Feminism, is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Although largely originating in the West, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.

There are people who believe that we do not need feminism today, but nothing could be further from the truth. Women have struggled for equality and against oppression for centuries, and although some battles have been partly won - such as the right to vote and equal access to education – women are still disproportionally affected by all forms of violence and by discrimination in every aspect of life.

Jokes about feminism and stereotypes about feminists persist, and many of these are also homophobic and assume that being lesbian is something 'bad'. In fact, being a feminist is not something particular to any sex or gender: there are women and men who consider themselves feminists, some are gay or lesbian, some heterosexual, bisexual or transgender - and some may identify differently.

The concept of feminism reflects a history of different struggles, and the term has been interpreted in fuller and more complex ways as understanding has developed. In general, feminism can be seen as a movement to put an end to sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression and to achieve full gender equality in law and in practice.

Taslima Nasrin (born 25 August 1962) is a Bangladeshi writer, physician, feminist, secular humanist, and activist. She is known for her writing on women's oppression and criticism of religion; some of her books are banned in Bangladesh. She has also been blacklisted and banished from

the Bengal region, both from Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal.

She gained global attention by the beginning of 1990s owing to her essays and novels with feminist views and criticism of what she characterizes as all "misogynistic" religions. Nasrin has been living in exile since 1994, with multiple fatwas calling for her death. After living more than a decade in Europe and the United States, she moved to India in 2004 and has been staying there on a resident permit long-term, multiple-entry or 'X' visa since.

The Book – "Dr TASLIN NASRIN - Controversial Feminist" – containing 15 chapters running into 261 pages makes an attempt to portray her life, sufferings and literary contributions. The book opens (Chapter-1) with 22 videos, running to 10+ hours, covering the several events/activities including her own speech.

Chapter-10 (30 Pages) seriously pictures her challenging activities in transforming/confronting the religious and related beliefs. The special feature is: Chapter-11 throws light on 21 feminists of the 21st century. Also, the awards (national / international) are detailed in Chapter-5.

The book offers several famous quotations (Chapter-12), some illustrative cartoons covering her life and activities (Chapter-13) and several photos/pictures (Chapter-14) of her life and the challenges she faced. The Chapater-15 takes the readers to 13 articles on the Novels of Dr Taslima Nasrin, by variety of specialists, published in several leading international journals.

Dr T Kalpalatha Reddy
Professor & Additional Dean – E&T
Dr MGR Educational and Research Institute

Born into a middle-class Muslim family in the town of Mymensingh in north Bangladesh in 1962, Taslima Nasrin received a liberal education. She studied medicine and received her degree at the age of 23, when she began working as a doctor in the poorer parts of her country. She wrote extensively for periodicals, and continued to do so even after moving to work in public hospitals in the capital city of Dacca. When her books were first published, Nasrin became a best-selling author. She came to the West's attention when Islamists in Bangladesh issued a fatwa against her in 1993, demanding her arrest and execution for blasphemy and insults to religion; indeed, the offer of $7,500 to whomever puts her to death remains in force. With the help of Western governments, she has been living in such Western countries as Sweden, Germany, the United States, and France. Two of her books Lajja (Shame), and Amar Meyebela (My Girlhood), the first volume of her autobiography, are banned in Bangladesh.

An author of magazine columns, poems, and fiction, Nasrin began publishing her writings in the 1970s. She wrote withering diatribes against the oppression of women and the Islamic code that she felt made them virtually the chattel of men. Her subject matter became increasingly sexual, and her condemnation of men was unrelenting. Contrary to Muslim practice, she wore her hair short and smoked cigarettes, and she eschewed traditional Muslim dress. Her writing and behaviour enraged and offended strict Muslims, and in 1992 groups of those who objected to her work attacked bookstores in Dhaka that had made her books available. Throughout these upheavals, she continued to publish, producing an autobiography in several volumes - Amar meyebela (1999; My Girlhood, also published as My Bengali Girlhood), Utal hava (2002; Wild Wind), and Dwikhandito (2003; "Divided") - as well as novels and poetry.

Nasrin has won many awards, including Ananda Puroshkar, an Indian literary award; the Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought from the European Parliament; the Kurt Tuckholsky award from Swedish PEN; a human rights prize from the French government; and a humanist award from International Humanist and Ethical Union. This interview took place in France in early 2000.

The Book – "Dr TASLIN NASRIN – Controversial Feminist", published by the Department of English – provides (Chapter-1) several videos covering her speech at the conclaves, her talk on Islam, about Israel-Hamas, her interviews with senor journalists, her talks in international conferences, her speech in the Delhi University Literature Festival 2024, her book talk on 'Lajja', her speech on 'Bangladesh Temple Attacks' and so many events.

Chapter-9 provides a list and a discussion about several of Taslima's books that have been banned, both in Bangladesh and in West Bengal. Cartoons on Taslima Nasrin (Chaptr-13) and Photos & Pictures (Chapter-14) cover several interesting/controversial events in her life in various countries; these may be very useful to the readers.

This book is dedicated to Gloria Marie Steinem, (born on 25 March, 1934) who is an American journalist and social-political activist who emerged as a nationally recognized leader of second-wave feminism in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Dr LS Shanthi
Prof Dr S Ramalingam

Videos >>> TN

Listen to Dr Taslima Nasrin [10+ Hours]

[Taslima Nasrin at India Ideas Conclave 2016]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ohl_LohxCbA

Taslima Nasrin, addressing the gathering at the 3rd India Ideas Conclave 2016, in Goa.

Time: 20:18

[Taslima Nasrin Exclusive: Islam Is Not A Religion Of Peace]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvC8kscL_6w

Bangladesh author in exile, Taslima Nasrin's exclusive interview with Rajdeep Sardesai on the Bangladesh terror attack and also on the larger question of links between Islam and terror. India Today Television marks the entry of the nation's most credible name in journalism - India Today into news television. Powered by a future-ready look and backed with the 40 year legacy of the India Today brand, the channel addresses the news consumption habits of an evolved digital-savvy audience while staying true to the journalistic principles of the India Today Group. With a paradigm shift in terms of television workflows and technology, the channel sets a new benchmark with a differentiated look. Innovative content formats and multiple news updates on the TV screen give immediacy and choice to the news viewer.

Time: 24:12

[Taslima Nasreen on her Life, Israel-Hamas, Sheikh Hasina ...]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2o_YMbDcZDA

Watch Exiled Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasreen sharing anecdotes from her life in Today's Wassup Aabir Podcast on ABP LIVE Podcasts. Watch her speaking about all the Fatwa's issued against her. She is sharing her outspoken opinion on the recent Israel Hamas war and more on this Podcast today with Aabir Lahiry.

Time: 55:30

[Exclusive: 'Islam Should Be Reformed', Interview Of Taslima ...]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8-JOTLOHIw

Watch the exclusive interview of Bangladeshi-Swedish writer Taslima Nasrin with senior journalist Dibang on ABP News. 'Islam should be reformed like other religions, laws should be changed', said Nasrin. The Nice attack took place on Thursday morning inside the Notre-Dame basilica before the first Mass of the day. One of the three victims, a 60-year-old woman, was "virtually beheaded".

Time: 16:28

Taslima Nasrin: The Woman Who Destroyed a Mosque **(Or Did She?)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsDpOFkGlYo

Taslima Nasrin's latest memoir 'Split' has caused a stir once again. The original Bangla edition was banned by the West Bengal government leading to her moving out of the state. Nasrin gets candid about love, hate, violence, and orgasms.

Time: 10:56

Exclusive Interview With Author Taslima Nasrin Par 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkFs5diTXng

Taslima Nasrin is a Bangladeshi author and former physician who has lived in exile since 1994. From a literary profile as a poet in the late 1980s, she rose to global attention by the end of the 20th century owing to her essays and novels with feminist views and severe criticism of religion.

Time: 14:50

Taslima Nasrin - My Struggle for Secularism

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uenbyW87gUg

Taslima Nasrin - My Struggle for Secularism, Human Rights, Freedom of Expression and for Women's Freedom Taslima Nasrin at the Global Atheist Convention Melbourne March 2010.

Time: 44:13

Celebrating Dissent: Interview Marathon part 3: Taslima Nasrin

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwjiG14oecU

This interview marathon offers an in-depth and intimate conversation with some of the keynote speakers of Celebrating Dissent. They share their personal stories. What drives them in their professional lives and how are they trying to make a difference through their work?

All of the speakers have made huge sacrifices in order to live their lives according to their own ideals. Their believes have cost them their personal safety and the possibility to live in the country where they were born. Nonetheless, they continue their fight against oppression, for equal rights and women's rights.

Every hour one speaker will be interviewed by a programmemaker of De Balie. During the marathon it is possible to stretch your legs and walk in and out. Guests are invited to bring food and drinks from De Balie's restaurant to the interviews.

Taslima Nasrin is an award-winning writer, physician, and activist, known for her powerful writings on women oppression and unflinching criticism of religion, despite forced exile and multiple fatwas calling for her death.

Time: 57:45

Taslima Nasrin: Why Secularism is Necessary for Women's ...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_Wzym8snAY

Delivered at the Women in Secularism III conference on May 17, 2014.

Taslima Nasrin is an award-winning writer, physician, secular humanist and human rights activist known for her powerful writings on women oppression and unflinching criticism of religion, despite forced exile and multiple fatwas calling for her death.

In India, Bangladesh and abroad, Nasrin's fiction, nonfiction, poetry and memoir have topped best-seller's list. Born in Bangladesh, she is recipient of several awards for her human rights activism, including honorary citizenships with several major world cities, and honorary doctorates from great universities. She has been granted research fellowships at Harvard and New York Universities, as well as a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship in 2009.

Taslima has written 35 books in Bengali, which include poetry, essays, novels and an autobiographical series. Her works have been translated in thirty languages. Some of her books are banned in Bangladesh, and because of her ideas she has been blacklisted and banished from Bengal, both from Bangladesh and West Bengal part of India. She has been prevented by the authorities from returning to her country since 1994, and to West Bengal since 2007.

Time: 43:49

Poems and Feminism: Burning Roses in My Garden by ...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPWKrAaPXJw

Delhi University Literature Festival 2024

The collection of the translation of the poems by Taslima Nasrin; "Burning Roses in My Garden" dives into the gut-wrenching poetic tribute to women's sacrifices. It sheds light on her experiences, her exploration of love, and the challenges she faced, from her early start in poetry to the impact of societal norms on her work. The discussion delves into the translation challenges that affect her poetry or the world-poetry in general, and the skill and understanding required for effective translation. Taslima Nasrin's secret love for writing amid turmoil and violence is explored, along with her experiences living in Europe and Kolkata, as well as her persecution for critiquing Islam and advocating for women's rights. Her resilience and determination shine through as she navigates threats and persecution, ultimately revealing her unwavering commitment to her craft and her beliefs.

Time: 50:28

तस्लीमा नसरीन की "लज्जा" (Taslima Nasrin Ki "Lajja") || **By Shadab Ahmad**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgrGXGXMLw5M

Islamic Research & Propagastion Centre(IRPC) Giridih, Jharkhand, India.

Time: 1:20:39

Exclusive Interview of Taslima Nasrin with Anjan Dutta ...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pz3Q8F5FXNQ

In this video Taslima Nasrin is interviewed by Anjan dutta||Episode 1.
Details given Below.
Taslima Nasrin is a Bangladeshi-Swedish writer, physician, feminist, secular humanist and human rights activist. She is known for her writing on women's oppression and criticism of religion, despite forced exile. Some of her books are banned in Bangladesh. She has been blacklisted and banished from the Bengal region.

Time: 15:20

Walk The Talk With Bangladeshi Author Taslima Nasreen

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WQS_qEbndU

"Why can't state and religion be separate? And Quran was written by man, not by God," says Taslima Nasreen, the famous Bangladeshi author banished from her home country for her anti-establishment views. Criticised by several Muslim clerics across nations, Ms Nasreen -sometimes given the moniker 'Woman with Reckless Courage' - says that she is against fundamentalism of any kind and abhors any religion that enslaves women. On the issue of Rohingyas being expelled from India she says the Indian government should learn from the European nations in the way they accepted Syrian refugees. And on why most Indian politicians refuse to meet her, she replies with a chuckle, "They're afraid they'll lose votes". Watch Walk the Talk with Taslima Nasreen to know why she thinks Aung San Suu Kyi doesn't deserve the Nobel Peace Prize.

Time: 14:58

Here's What Taslima Nasrin Said On France Terror Attack ...

https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=792444204871066

Time: 37:14

Exclusive Interview | Taslima Nasrin

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uz-Vp9KGVho

Time: 22:50

CNN IBN Taslima Nasrin 22 4 2007

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8VjtdgpWLM

Time: 18:59

Book Talk: "Lajja (Shame) by Taslima Nasrin | Baat Kitaabon Ki

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-Pd4fjZqhY

Kamlesh Tripathi talks about the famous book Lajja, written by proclaimed author Taslima Nasrin.

Time: 10:54

In conversation with Taslima Nasrin | Taslima Nasrin in ... https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=10154265907533580 **Time: 46:03**
തസ്ലീമ നസ്രീന്റെ ജീവിതസംഘർഷങ്ങൾ | Taslima Nasrin ... https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80aVxGxRP1Y Story of Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasrin | Vallathoru Katha Episode #79 | Taslima Nasrin is a Bangladeshi-Swedish writer, physician, feminist, secular humanist, and activist. She is known for her writing on women's oppression and criticism of religion. **Time: 35:14**
Bangladesh banned book: Lajja by Taslima Nasrin https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s01DdfhVH_M Learn about the controversial novel "Lajja" by Taslima Nasrin in this educational video. Explore the themes and background of this important work and gain insight into the author's perspective. **Time: 18:40**
Bangladesh Temple Attacks: How Can Hasina Govt Ensure ... https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J95v0Ym787U India Today TV Consulting Editor Rajdeep Sardesai spoke to Bangladeshi-Swedish writer Taslima Nasreen over the ongoing violence against Hindus in Bangladesh. Taslima Nasreen said Hindu houses, temples, shops were destroyed in Bangladesh, but nobody has been brought to justice because Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina backs radical Islamists **Time: 14:21**
The Outlier Episode 6 - Taslima Nasrin, Author and Activist, in ... https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=578908446328008 **Time: 27:12**
Taslima Nasrin (Bangladeshi author) | Interview with Taslima ... https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR_wNvybsUQ Taslima Nasrin (Bangladeshi author) | Interview with Taslima Nasrin by Shajahan **Time: 20:23**

Dr Taslima Nasrin

[https://abiography.org/a-biography-of-taslima-nasrin/]

BIOGRAPHY OF
Taslima Nasrin
(25 August, 1962 - Present

A BIOGRAPHY OF TASLIMA NASRIN

Taslima Nasrin (1962 – Present) is a Bangladeshi-Swedish writer, physician, feminist, secular humanist, and activist. She has written extensively against violence against women. She has also written and criticized a lot about religion which has resulted in some of his books being banned in Bangladesh.

In the early 1990s, she wrote essays and novels on feminist perspectives. That's why she became popular with everyone. She described all of these as "misogynistic" religions. She has been expelled from Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. Her exile began in 1994. She has lived a long time in Europe and the United States. She then stayed in India on a multiple-entry or "X" visa in 2004 but was deported from India in 2008. She now lives in New Delhi, India.

Table of Contents

- Life of "Taslima Nasrin" At a Glance:
- Early Life and Education:
- Career:
- Life in exile:
- Works:
- Nasrin's life and works in adaption:
- Writers and intellectuals for and against Nasrin:
- Other activities:
- Disclaimer:

Life of "Taslima Nasrin" at a Glance:

Profession:

Writer

Secular humanist

Physician

Feminist

Activist

Born: 1962

Place of Birth: Mymensingh, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)

Nationality: Bangladeshi, Swedish, Indian

Religion: Islam

Education:

Mymensingh Medical College

Father: Dr. Rajab Ali

Mother: Edul Ara

Marital Status: Divorced

Novels:

Lajja, 1993

Forashi Premik (French Lover), 2002

Oporpokkho (The Opponent), 1992

Beshorom (Shameless), 2019

Poetry(s):

Nirbashito Narir Kobita (Poems From Exile), 1996

Atole ontorin (Captive in the Abyss), 1991

Balikar Gollachut (Game of the Girls), 1992

Golpo (stories), 2018

Jolpodyo (Waterlilies), 2000

Bondini (Prisoner), 2008

Khali Khali Lage (Feeling Empty), 2004

Kicchukhan Thako (Stay for a While), 2005

Amar Kichu Jay Ashe Ne (I Couldn't Care Less), 1990

Shikore Bipul Khudha (Hunger in the Roots), 1982

Awards, Honours, and Achievements:

Sakharov Prize (1994)

Human Rights Award (1994)

Edict of Nantes Prize (1994)

Kurt Tucholsky Prize (1994)

Honorary citizenship from Esch, Luxembourg (2011)

Honorary doctorate, 2011

Feminist Press award, 2009Academy Award, 2013

Age (as of 2021): 59 Years

Early Life and Education:

Taslima Nasrin was born in 1962 in Mymensingh into a respective Muslim Family. She passed SSC in 1976 and HSC in 1978. She studied Medicine at the Mymensingh Medical College and

graduated in 1984. Her first poetry is "Shenjuti". After her graduation, she worked at a family planning clinic (Mymensingh). During her study time, she saw many girls being raped. She also saw that if someone had a daughter, their family would cry. At one point she became an atheist.

Career:

It was through writing poetry that her literary career began. Her poetry became so popular that between 1982 and 1993, half a dozen collections of poetry were published. She has written several articles and novels about a Hindu family being attacked by Muslim fanatics and deciding to leave the country. She has to endure a lot of physical and mental torture for criticizing Islam and demanding equal rights for women. For all this reason, it was decided to hang her. In October 1993, a council of Islamic soldiers provided a grant for her death. She had to face criticism from Islamic fundamentals for making inflammatory statements. After so many things happened, she was in hiding for 2 months. At the end of 1994, she fled to Sweden and stopped her medical practice, and began writing.

Life in exile:

After feeling Bangladesh, she spent the next ten years in Sweden, Germany, France, and the United States. She lived in Kolkata, India from 2004 to 2007. She is under house arrest in Kolkata after being physically assaulted by her opponents in Hyderabad and she moved to West Bengal on 22 November 2007. Then she left Bangladesh at the end of 1994 and lived in Western Europe and North America for ten years. She took

refuge in Germany after the Swedish government granted her citizenship. She waited for six years to get an Indian visa. She was not given a Bangladeshi passport even when her mother and father were on their deathbed. The Indian government extended her visa but refused to grant her citizenship. While living in Kolkata, she regularly contributed to the Anandabazar and Indian newspapers and magazines. On 9 August 2007, Nasrin was on her way to Hyderabad to present a Telugu translation of the novel "Shodh" when she was attacked by a mob led by legislators from the Indian political party Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen. In January 2008, she was nominated for the Simone de Beauvoir Prize in Paris for her work on women's rights but refused to go to Paris because she wanted to fight for independence from India. She was deported from India on 19 March 2008.

Works:

Nasrin started writing poetry when she was 13 years old. While she was in college in Mymensingh, she published a literary magazine (1978-1983), Senjuti ("Light in the Dark"). Her first collection of poems was published in 1986 and her second in 1989. Her column attracted a large readership in the early 1970s. In 1990, her novel became very popular. She has written more than 30 books on poetry, essays, novels, short stories, and memories. She has contributed a lot to the weekly political newspaper published in Dhaka in 1989. In 1992, she won the Ananda Award, a prestigious award for Bengali writers. While in Kolkata, she wrote a weekly article in the Bengali edition of the

statesman called daily Statesman. Taslima used to write articles for The Print, an online media enterprise from India. Two of her novels, written in 1992, failed to grab people's attention. In 1993, her famous novel "Lajja" was published. This novel sold 50,000 copies in just six months. Another of her famous novels, French Lover, was published in 2002. She was banned by the Bangladesh government in 1999 for her reckless remarks against Islam and the prophet Mohammad, the first part of her memoir, My Girlhood (My Girlhood, 2002). The second part of her memoir "Utal Hawa" (Wild Wind) was also banned by the Bangladesh government in 2002. In 2003, the third part of her memoir, "Ka"(Speak Up), was banned by the Bangladeshi High Court.

Nasrin's life and works in adaption:

In 2006, there was a TV serial called Jhumur based on a story. Famous singers like Fakir Alamgir, Samina Nabi, and Rakhi Sen have sung her songs. In 1997, Steve Lacy, jazz soprano saxophonist met Nasrin and helped her transform her poetry into music. The recitations that Nasrin used to perform during the performance were dropped in 1997 after the Berlin World Premiere due to security concerns.

Writers and intellectuals for and against Nasrin:

Writers and intellectuals from Bangladesh and West Bengal have criticized Nasrin for making "offensive, false and ridiculous" remarks in her famous novel Ka. Bangladeshi poet and novelist Syed Shamsul Haque filed a defamation suit against Nasrin in 2003, saying she had an affair with her brother-in-law. As a result, her book was rejected by the High Court and a 4 million

defamation suit was filed against her. In 2003, the West Bengal government decided to ban her books. Nasrin mentions that she did it to gain fame and to write about her life story. Despite all this, Nasrin Annada, Shankar Roy, Shivnarayan Roy, and Amlan Dutt supported her. She is currently protected by writer Mahasweta Devi, theater director Vibhas Chakraborty, poet Joy Goswami, artist Prakash Karmakar, and Paritosh Sen.

Other activities:

She is currently a member of the Emeritus Board of Reporters Without Borders (RWB).

(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)

Kindly visit these Web Links:

01] https://starsunfolded.com/taslima-nasrin/

02]https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/11/nasrin-taslima/

Narrated

TIMELINE

1962 – Taslima was born to a Muslim family but was brought up in a secular environment.

Student life

1976 – Secondary School Certificate 1st division
1978 – Higher Secondary certificate 1st division
1984- Medical Degree (M.B.B.S)
1985- Entered In-service training

Life as a Doctor

1986-1989- Taslima worked in the villages as a medical officer.
1990-1993- She worked in gynecology and anesthesiology departments in medical college and hospitals.
1993- She was forced to quit her job, as the Government confiscated her passport and asked her to stop writings.

A Writer's life

1975- She begins publishing her poems in literary magazines.
1978- Started editing and publishing poetry magazine.
1986- Her first poetry book was published.
1989- Taslima's second poetry book was published. She started writing columns on women's rights in the newspapers and magazines and became a very popular columnist.

1990- Saw the publication of her third poetry book. Islamic fundamentalists started campaign against her and broke the newspaper offices and filed cases against her because she criticized Islamic oppression on women.
1991- This year saw her book 'Selected Columns' getting published and her becoming a best selling author. Islamic fundamentalists continued their vicious demonstrations and processions against her all over the country.
1992- Taslima's second book of essays was published. Her books of poetry and novels also were published. "Taslima smash committee" was formed. They burnt Taslima's book in the national book fair. And Taslima was not allowed to visit the book fair. She received the prestigious literary award

”Ananda” for her book ”selected columns” from India. And also became a best-selling author in West Bengal, a state of India.

1993- Her documentary novel ‘Lajja’, which is a protest against the torture on the minority community of Bangladesh was published. Lajja was banned by the Government of Bangladesh. The third book of essays on women’s freedom was published. Taslima was physically attacked by the fundamentalists in the national book fair. They broke the bookstall where she was giving autographs to her readers. She was asked by the book fair committee not to visit the fair anymore. Islamic fundamentalists issued fatwa against her and set a price on her head.

1994- Her books started getting published in many Indian and European languages. Muslim fundamentalists demanded her execution by hanging. Countrywide protest started against Taslima’s views. Death penalty against blasphemy was demanded. The Government of Bangladesh filed a case against her on the charges of hurting religious feelings of the people and a non-bailable arrest warrant was issued against her. She went into hiding with the help of a few secular people in Bangladesh. 300,000 fundamentalists held a public meeting and demanded her death. General Strikes were called all over the country to demand Taslima’s execution. The country was paralyzed by the strikes. Two more fatwas were issued against her by the religious fundamentalists. Writers and intellectuals outside Bangladesh supported Taslima and demanded her safety and security. After staying in hiding for two months, she was granted bail from the high court and was forced to leave her country. She received the Kurt Tucholsky prize from the Swedish PEN.

Sakharov prize for freedom of thoughts was given to her by the European Parliament. She received the Human Rights award From the French Government. She was awarded with Edit de Nantes prize in France. Bangladeshi publishers and newspapers-editors stopped publishing her books and columns.

1995- Honorary Doctorate degree was given from Gent University, Belgium.
1996- A poetry book that expressed her longing for her homeland was published.

1997- Started writing her autobiography

1999- First part of her autobiography was banned by the Bangladesh Government.

2000- She received Ananda literary award from West Bengal, India.

2002- Seocnd part of her autobiography was banned by the Bangladesh Government. A Bangladesh court sentenced her to one year in prison on a charge of writing derogatory comments about Islam in several of her books.

2003- Third part of her autobiography was banned by Bangladesh court. She got fellowship from Harvard University, USA. Nearly 4 million dollar defamation lawsuits were filed against Taslima for writing Dwikhandito both in Bangladesh and in India by two male writers. West Bengal Government banned 'Dwikhandito', the third part of her autobiography on the charges of hurting religious feelings of the people.

2004- Fourth part of her autobiography was banned by Bangladesh Government. A prize for the promotion of tolerance and non-violence was given from UNESCO. 2005- Received Honorary Doctorate from American University of Paris, France. Grand prix International Codorcet-Aron 2005 was given from the French-Parliament in Belgium. Kolkata High Court lifted the ban on her book.

2007-2008- Blacklisted in Bangladesh, she is now blacklisted in the West Bengal, a state of India. Newspaper-editors refused to publish her articles and the publishers were afraid to print her books. She was given 'Simone de Beauvoir prize' in France. 'Citizen of Honor' was given by the city of Paris, France. Prins Global fellowship was given by the literature department of New York University, USA.

2009 Malayalam edition of her new book "Shame again" was published in Kerala. And Hindi version of her books "Bondini" and "Narir kono Desh nei" were published in New Delhi, India. "Bondini" and "Narir kono desh nei" were published in Bangladesh by her family members. Taslima received Woodrow Wilson fellowship in the USA. Taslima received 'Feminist Press Award' for her writing on feminism in the USA.

2010 Taslima's 6th part of autobiography (nei, kichu nei) is published both in India and Bangladesh. A group of courageous Bengali intellectuals started publishing Taslima's column in their Magazine called "Robbar", but after one article was published, she was banned. Jansatta, a Hindi newspaper, after publishing 4 columns of Taslima, banned her. A newspaper in karnataka, India published Taslima's column without taking her permission. It was about Taslima's advice to women not to wear burqa, the symbol of oppression. 15,000 Muslim fanatics started violent protest against the publication and burnt the newspaper offices. Two people were killed. Curfew was imposed in the cities.

2012 Taslima's new book the 7th part of autobiography 'Nirbasan' was not allowed to be launched at Kolkata Book Fair. Police and Book Fair committee

banned book launch. Aagami Prakashan is publishing Taslima's books legally in Bangladesh.

Life in exile 1994

Taslima lived in Sweden and started getting invitations from all over the world to give lectures on Human Rights, Women's Rights, Secularism and Freedom of expression. She became a symbol of free speech.

1995-1996- Lived to Germany. She did not want to give up her Bangladesh passport.

1997- Moved to Sweden. As a political refugee she received the United Nation's travel document.

1998- Started living in the USA. She wanted to go back to Bangladesh to be with her ailing mother but the Government denied her entry into the country. Taslima came out of her political asylum, cancelled her refugee status by returning the UN travel document that is given to the political refugees. Then, she got her Bangladesh passport back from the Swedish authorities. And despite getting no permission from the Bangladesh Government, with that passport she entered into her country A case was filed against her on the charges of hurting religious feelings. A non-bailable arrest warrant was issued against her. She was forced to leave her country once again. She became the number one target of Huji, the Islamic terrorist group. After staying for three months in her country, she was forced to leave once again.

1999-2000- Lived in France After 6 years of waiting, she was granted visa for India and she immediately visited Kolkata where she could felt at home. Taslima was invited to go to Mumbai to inaugurate her book in Mumbai, India. But the Islamic fundamentalists started campaign against her and declared that they would burn her alive if she arrives in Mumbai. 2001-2002- Lived in Sweden and visited India with tourist visa. Bangladesh Government had been refusing to renew her passport for years so she was forced to carry an European passport. She begged the Government to allow her to enter Bangladesh so that she could be with her dying father at least for a few days. But she was denied to enter her own country. Her father died.

2003-2004- The fundamentalists issued fatwa against her in India. She got residence permit to live in India. She moved to Kolkata and started living there, For the first time in her exile life, she settled somewhere.

2005- One more fatwa was issued against her in UP, India. A price of Rupees 500,000 was set for her head.

2006–Taslima was invited in Midnapore in West Bengal to attend a cultural program, the Muslim fundamentalists protested against her visit, so that the authority cancelled the program. Taslima was invited to inaugurate a book fair in Siliguri in West Bengal, she was prevented to go there after the fanatics protested against her.

2007- She was attacked by the Muslim fundamentalists in Hyderabad, India. The fundamentalists issued fatwa against her and set a price (unlimited reward) on her head in a public meeting in Kolkata. She was invited by the Allahabad University as a speaker, but because she was attacked in Hyderabad, the University cancelled Taslima's lecture. She was forced to live under virtual house arrest in Kolkata and was constantly asked by the WB Government to leave the state. Violent protest was held by the Muslim fundamentalists demanding her deportation from India. She was thrown out of Kolkata by West Bengal Government. She was sent to city of Jaipur in Rajasthan, but was not allowed to stay there. She was bundled out of Jaipur. She was kept in an undisclosed location in Delhi where she was forced to live under house arrest.

2008- The Government asked Taslima to leave India. After staying for seven-and-ahalf months under house arrest she was forced to leave India in March. Taslima applied for the renewal of her Bangladesh passport again. And again it was denied to her. She even requested Bangladesh Government to issue a "no visa required' stamp or at least a tourist visa for Bangladesh on her European passport. But this was also not granted. She returned to India in August. She had to stay in Delhi and was not allowed to go to Kolkata, not even for two days to pack her bags and leave. She was forced to quit her establishment in Kolkata. She was given the extension of her residence permit with the condition that she must leave India within a few days after her permit was renewed. She was forced to leave India once again.

2009 Taslima came to India in Februay before her residence permit expired. But the world's largest democracy laid down that Taslima could get an extension of her residence permit for India only if she gives an undertaking that:

1. She would leave India (and she must show her flight ticket to prove she is leaving) before 17th of February (the day her residence permit would expire),

2. She must not go to Kolkata,

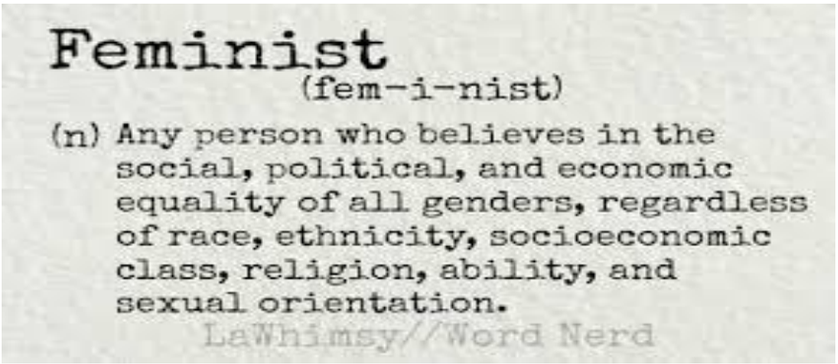
3. She must not interact with media and 4.She must not enter India before 31st May (by this time the general election in India would be over). Taslima had no other alternative but to leave India silently. Mayor of Paris invited Taslima to stay in a artist's residence in Paris for 6 months. She tried to go

back to Bangladesh, but failed. The government of Bangladesh continued to deny her right to return. She returned to India in August to find out whether she could live in Delhi, if not Kolkata. But the Government of India refused to give her permission to live anywhere in India. The Government extended her residential permit with the precondition that she must not reside in India and she would have to leave immediately after the permit was renewed. Taslima was forced to leave India again. Dipu Moni, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, has been frequently telling the media that the Bangladesh Government has no problem in allowing Taslima to enter her country. Dipu Moni said, Taslima can return to Bangladesh whenever she wants. But in reality, Taslima is not being allowed to enter her country. After Dipu Moni's public statement, Taslima applied to renew her Bangladesh passport so that she could enter Bangladesh, but the Bangladesh Government did not respond. She also tried to get a Bangladesh visa on her European passport. Even that has been denied to her.

2010 Taslima returned to India in February. Her residence permit for India was extended for 6 months. But she was told by the government that her residence permit would not be further extended. Taslima was again shocked. In 2007, making a statement in the Indian parliament, the foreign minister said" throughout history, India has never refused shelter to those who have come and sought our protection. This civilizational heritage, which is now government policy, will continue, and India will provide shelter to Ms. Nasreen". In 2008, the PM of India wrote "India's glorious tradition of welcoming people irrespective of caste, community and religion will continue, whatever be the odds. The atmosphere of hate being perpetuated by a small segment within the country will not prevent us from persisting with this tradition. We recognize Taslima Nasreen's right to remain in a country of her choice, viz, India in this case. She should also have the option to choose which ever city or state she chooses."

Taslima's residence permit for India has been extended in August 17.

(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)


Feminist
(fem-i-nist)
(n) Any person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of all genders, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, religion, ability, and sexual orientation.
LaWhimsy//Word Nerd

An Interview >>> MEQ

https://www.meforum.org/73/taslima-nasrin-they-wanted-to-kill-me

Taslima Nasrin

"They Wanted to Kill Me"

Middle East Quarterly
September 2000, pp. 67-74

Born into a middle-class Muslim family in the town of Mymensingh in north Bangladesh in 1962, Taslima Nasrin received a liberal education. She studied medicine and received her degree at the age of 23, when she began working as a doctor in the poorer parts of her country. She wrote extensively for periodicals, and continued to do so even after moving to work in public hospitals in the capital city of Dacca. When her books were first published, Nasrin became a best-selling author. She came to the West's attention when Islamists in Bangladesh issued a fatwa against her in 1993, demanding her arrest and execution for blasphemy and insults to religion; indeed, the offer of $7,500 to whomever puts her to death remains in force. With the help of Western governments, she has been living in such Western countries as Sweden, Germany, the United States, and France. Two of her books Lajja (Shame),[1] and Amar Meyebela (My Girlhood), the first volume of her autobiography, are banned in Bangladesh. Nasrin has won many awards, including Ananda Puroshkar, an Indian literary award; the Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought from the European Parliament; the Kurt Tuckholsky award from Swedish PEN; a human rights prize from the French government; and a humanist award from International Humanist and Ethical Union. This interview took place in France in early 2000.

Middle East Quarterly: What began your problems with fundamentalist Muslims in Bangladesh?

Taslima Nasrin: I started writing a newspaper column in 1989 based on my experiences as a doctor and on my observation generally about the plight of women and their oppression in the male-dominated society of Bangladesh. I defended the rights of women against religion and patriarchy, which I see as the causes of women's suffering. In particular, I wrote about the role of religion in this ill-treatment of women. With more than 80 percent of the country's population Muslim, Islam is the country's most important religion. Many of my countrymen, fundamentalist Muslims and ordinary religious Bengalis alike, did not agree with what I wrote, and started to hate me. The fundamentalists organized demonstrations and processions against me from 1990 on; they attacked and sacked the newspaper office where I used to write my columns, they burnt my books in public, and finally they filed a case against me in the courts.

MEQ: You have written quite a bit?

Nasrin: Yes: six novels, eight collections of poetry (some of which first appeared in newspapers and magazines in Bangladesh), and four volumes of essays (also reprints from newspapers and magazines). Those were burned by religionists, and many cases were filed against me as a writer and the publishers of those books.

MEQ: Then came *Lajja*.

Nasrin: Yes, it was my fourth novel; it came out in February 1993. It is a documentary novel about the precarious existence of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh especially in the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, India, by Hindu fundamentalists on December 6, 1992. The Muslim mobs in Bangladesh took their revenge on the Hindu minority. I was writing about the oppression of the Hindus by the Muslim majority in the name of religion. They smashed the houses of the Hindus in the name of religion, and looted their shops. Of course, as a result many Hindus left Bangladesh for India. I was protesting the torture of Hindu communities.

My book was banned in 1993 on charges of disturbing communal harmony. In 1994 a newspaper in Calcutta published an interview with me, where I said that the Shari'a [sacred law of Islam] should be abolished. Unfortunately, the newspaper misquoted me as saying that I thought "the Qur'an should be revised thoroughly." But as I do not believe in the Qur'an, there is no reason for me to say it should be revised. I think the Qur'an is,

like all religious scriptures, out of place and out of time, totally irrelevant for our era. Nothing will be gained by reforming the Qur'an; instead, what is needed is a uniform civil code of laws that is not based on religious dogmas, and that is equally applicable to men and women.

MEQ: That interview provoked a strong reaction.

Nasrin: The Muslim fundamentalists became very angry and issued fatwas against me again in 1994, declaring me an apostate, demanded my execution by hanging, and the banning of all my books. They even filed cases against my editors and publishers. The fundamentalists called for a general strike to protest against my writings. They were able to mobilize over 300,000 people in just one demonstration in Dhaka, and they openly called for my execution by hanging, in fact, they put a price on my head. They offered a lot of money to anyone killing me. For weeks, much of the country was on general strike, demanding my death, and Islamists killed some people because they did not want to strike. Not only that, the government filed a case against me.

MEQ: How did the Bangladesh government respond?

Nasrin: Instead of protecting me, it banned my book in June 1993 and filed a criminal case against me in July 1994, charging me with hurting the religious feelings of the people. This situation forced me into hiding for two months, and then to flee Bangladesh.

MEQ: Was your life really in danger, or was that the exaggeration of the media?

Nasrin: Of course there was danger! People are rightly afraid of the fundamentalists, for they can kill people whenever they want and are very powerful. People have been killed in the past. Why should the media be on my side as they too are influenced by religion?

MEQ: How did you manage to escape from Bangladesh?

Nasrin: Under pressure from Western countries and from various human rights groups, the Bangladesh government agreed to grant me bail on condition that I leave the country. I got out with the help of some government in Europe, the United States government, the PEN organization, humanist and human rights organizations. I had the Bangladesh police protecting me as far as the airport. It was arranged by the European Union that I should get asylum in Sweden, so Swedish security police and foreign ministry people came to take me from Bangladesh.

MEQ: Do you have police protection now in the West?

Nasrin: When I arrived in Sweden, as many as a hundred policemen and policewomen were guarding me round the clock. On one occasion I slipped out to take a walk in the snow, but was severely told off and told not to do that again. And I had protection in every country I went to. After a few years I just could not stand it anymore, being surrounded by police all the time. I wanted to move freely, for I feel safe here in the West. Now, I only have police protection when I speak to large groups. Most of the time I avoid been protected by police, as it hampers my freedom. But when I recently visited India (the first time in six years), I had tight police protection the whole time. The Muslim fundamentalists demonstrated against my visit in Bombay, and 140 people were arrested. The Indian government has since decided not to allow me visit India anymore.

MEQ: Have you been physically attacked?

Nasrin: On one occasion in Bangladesh, at the national book fair, the fundamentalists attacked me physically; I was knocked to the ground and had my clothes torn. At Nottingham in England some Muslim students tried to attack me physically but the police saved me. In Concordia, Canada, I was forced to stop speaking because of Muslim student demonstrations. On several occasions, Muslim students stopped me from speaking.

MEQ: Surely you realized that you would offend the religious feelings of millions of believers of a great world religion by asking for the abolition of the Shari'a?

Nasrin: To a certain extent I realized that, but I always want to tell the truth — so I did. When I write and express my ideas I never think of what might happen in the future. But I did know that it is very necessary to tell the truth, to wake people up, because ignorant people believe in religion, and because of religion, women are oppressed; women do not have any freedom as human beings. Also, the religious minorities especially in Bangladesh are oppressed, too, because they are not of the same faith. I knew that I would face a lot of problems but I did not care. I needed to tell the truth.

MEQ: You were surprised by what happened?

Nasrin: Yes. I never realized the fundamentalists would be so angry that they would issue a *fatwa*, or that my life would be in danger. I never realized that I would have to leave my own country. I thought it would be possible for me to fight them by organizing a strong secular force within the country.

MEQ: Have you received support within Bangladesh? Or within the Muslim world generally?

Nasrin: Yes, several secular intellectuals wrote in my defense and generally supported me very much. I was hiding in Bangladesh for two months, and without the support of these intellectuals, it would have been impossible for me to survive. They literally saved my life. I also had support from many Muslims in other countries who wrote many articles supporting me in their journals. In fact, even Iranian feminists came to my defense.

MEQ: Have you met Salman Rushdie? Does he support you?

Nasrin: No, unfortunately, I have not met him yet, but yes, he has supported me. He wrote a letter defending my cause. He still supports me.

MEQ: Are his and your situations similar?

Nasrin: Not very. Salman Rushdie did not live in Iran, and as he lived in a Western democracy, he got police protection and lots of support. He also got lots of support in the West because (even though he was born in India) he has lived in the West since childhood. Also, he writes in English, and so is much closer to Western readers.

My situation is a little different. I was living in a country where fundamentalists issued a *fatwa* against me — I had to fight them directly while living in the same country. I had to live in a country where most of the people are religious and most of the people were against me, and they wanted to kill me — it was a much more difficult situation for me. The British government was not against him but my government was against me. Rushdie was in a safer situation, but we could both be killed at any time.

Another difference: Rushdie writes for aesthetic reasons, for the sake of writing; I write to change society, about such subjects as women's issues, the role of Islam, and the partition of India. We have very different goals.

MEQ: You had a small falling out with Rushdie. Can you explain what happened?

Nasrin: I once said that Rushdie should never have apologized (as he did at the very end of 1990) for having writing *The Satanic Verses.* I believe he showed cowardice in declaring his Islamic faith and calling on the publisher of *The Satanic Verses* neither to issue the book in paperback nor to allow it

to be translated. Hearing this criticism, Rushdie became angry with me. That's all – no falling out. It's just that I have this habit of telling what comes to my mind.

MEQ: Do you have anything in common with Nasr Abu Zayd, the Egyptian scholar of Islam who had to flee his homeland because the Islamists managed to get a court to determine that, because of his writings, he was a non-Muslim?

Nasrin: Not much. The main difference between us is that I don't believe in the Qur'an or any religious scripture at all, whereas Abu Zayd does. Yes, he like me wrote about changing the Shari`a, but he did so from the vantage point of a believer, someone who accepts Islam, the Qur'an. He simply wanted some modifications of the Shari`a laws, that's all. Even though he believes in religion he still had problems in Egypt, merely for wanting some modifications to the Shari`a.

I don't agree with him. I don't want modifications of the Shari`a but I want civil laws that give equality and justice for women. I don't want Muslim law, Hindu law, or Christian law. I don't want any law based on religion.

MEQ: But if ever there is a reformation in Islam, won't it have to come from within — from people like Abu Zayd?

Nasrin: I think it is necessary to fight Islam within Islamic countries. As for Abu Nasr Zayd, I just don't think his piecemeal approach works, and this is shown by the fact he and his wife had to flee Egypt; they are now living in the Netherlands.

Revolution is necessary against all evil forces, against religion, with no compromises. If the secular forces get stronger in Islamic countries, I am sure the changes would happen quickly. But the secular forces don't get as much support from outside as do the fundamentalists.

MEQ: How does Nasr Abu Zayd react to your ideas?

Nasrin: He and I had a discussion. When I said that human rights and Islam were incompatible, he said he does not believe in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR]. He does not think that the UDHR is suitable for many countries, especially Islamic countries but holds that Muslim countries should have their own culture. He believes they should have different types of human rights and an Islamic Declaration of Human Rights. I don't agree; I think human rights are truly universal and applicable to all cultures.

Secularism

MEQ: You call for complete secularism, but is that feasible in Muslim countries?

Nasrin: Certainly. Turkey is a secular country, for example. Also, when Bangladesh was founded in 1971, a secular system was quickly introduced and no one objected to it. No one asked why we had secularism in a Muslim country where the majority religion is Islam; it was just accepted. But in 1984 some political leaders there threw secularism out, and instead established Islam as the state religion. These politicians used religion for their own political gains, for their own interests.

MEQ: Still, you are not going to change the attitude of one billion people overnight. Don't you need people like Nasr Abu Zayd who are sincere believers and who can influence fellow believers?

Nasrin: It is true we need all types of people to change the present conditions, perhaps even those who want to act tactically. But I prefer to talk directly and truthfully without hiding anything. People often tell me it is a question of tactics such as you mention, but I do not believe in tactics. I am not a diplomat or a politician, I just want to say whatever I believe in. That means abolishing religion.

MEQ: Why?

Nasrin: Because religion and freedom of expression, religion and human rights, religion and women's rights, religion and democracy, religion and freedom cannot coexist. That is impossible.

MEQ: Can your methods work?

Nasrin: Using tactics takes too long; it will take too much time to establish secularism this way. It will take too long before women have their rights in Islamic countries. While the rest of the world has advanced in this age of information and technology, the Islamic world has remained fixed. It is really backwards, living in the Middle Ages and darkness. What I want is a revolution — for women's freedom, for humanism, and to throw out unnecessary things like religion.

MEQ: Are you optimistic that secularism, human rights, and the rights of women will eventually prevail in the Muslim world?

Nasrin: I hope so. I believe so. Religion is sooner or later bound to die. You can't always remain in the dark. You have to search for light, meaning

education. Development and progress in the world depends on science; you can't live without it. As science and religion are contradictory, you have to accept one of them instead of mixing them forcibly.

Rejecting Islam

MEQ: Why do you reject Islam?

Nasrin: If any religion allows the persecution of people of different faith, if any religion keeps women in slavery, if any religion keeps people in ignorance, then I cannot accept that religion. Religion is a big factor in putting women into their house-cages. Even though many women have an education, they are not allowed to work; they have to be submissive to their husbands because their religion says so. For that reason, I do not accept Islam; so, I criticized it.

MEQ: Why do you attribute the situation of women in Islamic countries to Islam? Has it not more to do with socioeconomic factors, or even cultural and political development?

Nasrin: Yes, women are oppressed by culture, by traditions, and they are victims of socioeconomic conditions. But, they are also suffering because of Islam. Islam says that women should follow the orders of the husband. So if Islam is practiced in society, even good socioeconomic conditions cannot change the condition of women. Look at Saudi Arabia, it's a rich country, but what is the condition of women there? They are just like slaves, just like inferior beings; they are treated as second-class citizens. They do not have any rights. To improve the situation of women, to have equality and justice for women, means getting rid of religion as a source of law. That requires secularism.

MEQ: What do you make of the arguments by some Muslim neo-feminists like Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi (in her later writings) that the problem is not Islam, which they consider to be pro-women, but rather the interpretation of the Qur'an?

Nasrin: Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi are praised by many so-called liberal Muslims and also by Western intellectuals. They try to interpret the Qur'an in a new way, but I can't agree with them. How can one interpret the Qur'an positively on the question of women — when it says that men are superior to women, that men have the right to beat women, and that women should be submissive? In the matter of inheritance, women are not equal with men, and the testimony of women in a court of law is worth half that of men. In the Qur'an, it is written that men can have four wives. It is

impossible to think that this is equality. I don't believe any positive interpretation of these verses is possible.

Some Muslim feminists have tried to defend these aspects of the Qur'an by saying that the Qur'an was written 1,400 years ago, and those were the manners at that period. My reply is: In that case, why should we follow the Qur'an at all? It is not suitable or relevant now.

MEQ: How do you reply to the argument that by writing a book like *Lajja* you are playing into the hands of the Hindu fundamentalists, that you risk being exploited or manipulated by them for their own political purposes?

Nasrin: That is totally false. I am against all types of fundamentalists, whether Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, or Christian. There is no reason for me to be sympathetic to Hindu fundamentalists. Some people blame me because I criticized the Muslim fundamentalists and defended the Hindus. But I defended the Hindus as human beings, who were being oppressed by the Muslim fundamentalists. I was not defending Hindu fundamentalists.

Of course, in India the Hindu fundamentalists tried to highlight the issue; they championed me because I wrote against the Muslims, but I am not responsible for that. They are as bad as the Muslim fundamentalists — they know I don't support them; I am totally against them. It is not my fault if bad people use my book for their own interest. Writers write whatever they like, and if people use these writings for their own purpose, what can I as a writer do?

MEQ: Do the fundamentalist Hindus still champion you?

Nasrin: Hardly. I recently visited India and I wrote an article defending a film maker who was prevented by fundamentalist Hindus from shooting her film. This piece of mine made those fundamentalists angry with me and they even called for my arrest and my expulsion from the country. At present, in fact, I am having a problem getting a visa for India, as they are in power now.

Islamism

MEQ: What do you think is the reason for the rise in religious fundamentalism worldwide but particularly in Muslim countries?

Nasrin: I am not sure, but I think it has a lot to do with the failure of the modern state in the Islamic world. The leaders of these states have let their people down. There has been a big rise in the population, and the leaders have not been able to provide jobs, decent housing, health facilities, public

transport, and so on. There have also been human rights abuses, like torture and executions of opponents. The fundamentalists have exploited all these failures. They say that all the irreligious Western ideologies have failed—things like communism, socialism, and capitalism—and that now is the time to go back to their own culture, to their own roots, to go back to religion and Islam; that without religion everything will fail. Many frustrated, disillusioned people are looking for salvation in blind faith, among them you will find a good number of ex-communists.

MEQ: How do you assess the government reactions to them?

Nasrin: Weak. For their own political purposes, not only the Middle Eastern leaders but also the Western ones have made compromises with the fundamentalists — to get votes or to fight communism. Both have given the fundamentalists a sort of legitimacy.

MEQ: Do you think the fundamentalists will continue to grow in strength?

Nasrin: Whether they gain power depends on the power of secularism in those countries. If secularists unite and fight, the fundamentalists will not continue to rise.

MEQ: What do you make of their solutions to the problems of modern society?

Nasrin: With the fundamentalists in power, there will be no political stability, no democracy, nor human rights. They rely on blind faith and not reason; they insist on laws which they believe divine. They are against individualism; they prefer to sacrifice the individual in favor of group loyalty and the rights of the Muslim community; and they advocate hatred and violence. They do not want women to work, and if 50 percent of the population is inactive, how can there be development? No developed country will give economic aid if there is no political stability.

Islam and the West

MEQ: What is your reaction to the rise in the number of Muslims in the West, partly due to immigration and partly due to conversions? Do you see this as a positive phenomenon?

Nasrin: I don't believe in any national boundaries, people should have the right to live wherever they want to live. Immigration for political and economic reasons is inevitable. But I don't think it is a positive phenomenon when Westerners convert to Islam – just as it is not positive when they bow

their heads to Hinduism and Buddhism or start new religions like the so-called New Ageism.

MEQ: Do you agree with Samuel Huntington's thesis that there is bound to be a clash of civilizations?

Nasrin: No, I don't. It is not a question of a conflict between the West and the East, or between Christianity and Islam. It is, rather, a fight between tradition and innovation, antimodernism and modernity, fundamentalism and secularism, irrational blind faith and the logical inquisitive mind. It is a fight between those who value freedom and those who do not. In this fight, it bears noting, some Muslims defend modern ways and some many Westerners defend Islam, portraying it as an Eastern culture.

MEQ: Defend Islam as an Eastern culture?

Nasrin: It is the Western fashion now to defend different cultures. I have been attacked in Europe for criticizing Islam. They tell me that not all traditions in the Islamic world are harmful to women. Imagine, I have been told that the position of women in Bangladesh is very good. They even consider harems not necessarily bad for women!

MEQ: And your reaction?

Nasrin: That this is nonsense. If customs are bad for Western women, they are also bad for Eastern women. If education is good for Western women, surely it must also be good for Eastern ones. Muslim women urgently need a modern, secular education, as the rate of illiteracy among them is very high; education would give them some kind of economic independence, and finally would help to liberate them.

[1] Trans. into English and published as *Shame* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1998).

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Taslima Nasreen

A Portrait of an Artist as a Woman

On the author's birthday today, we present our complete interview with her, an exclusive feature from our all-new Platform bookazine.
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

As one reads James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the emancipation of the artist from the ideological clutches of society feels like an empowering liberation for the reader as well. I felt a similar surge of inspiration and awe while I was interviewing eminent writer, Taslima Nasreen. Her story is testament to why the written word is revolutionary. Even after her novel *Lajja* (Shame) led to her suffering a number of physical and other attacks — and eventual exile — for her critical scrutiny of Islam and her demand for women's equality, Taslima never stopped fighting for justice through her writing.

With the recent release of the English translation of her sequel to *Lajja* called *Shameless*, readers will see her unabashed and subversive writing come to life once again. Her narrative, exploring the lives of the protagonists of *Lajja*, after they flee from Bangladesh to India, in hope of a better life, slowly gets subsumed by Taslima's feminism.

What is your first memory of writing?

My first memory is that of writing poems. The title of my first poem, as far as I remember, was *A Free Bird*. I was about twelve years old and we were just allowed to go to school and come back. We were not allowed to go to the fields, like my brothers, to play football or cricket. I always wanted to go out but couldn't. I always wanted to have freedom to go wherever I wanted to go. So the poem was also about how I wanted to fly free and see the sea, the nature, like a free bird because my parents said that it was dangerous for girls to go outside and I was confined within the walls of my home. The poem was actually published later. My eldest brother used to publish a little magazine. In both East and West Bengal, the little magazine was a type of literary magazine, which was very popular among young poets and writers who were kind of rebellious — and whose works were not accepted by larger, national newspapers and magazines. It was very revolutionary, filled with the voices of rebels with new ideas. So when I turned around seventeen or eighteen, I also started publishing a literary magazine.

What led you to pursue writing as a career?

It began as my hobby. I used to read and write a lot when I was in school. I used to go to public and school libraries and read all the books available there. I was a kind of a bookworm. I couldn't go outside to play or to friends' houses to chat and spend time, so I used to spend most of my time reading. Over time, I developed a passion to write about my feelings and thoughts. Also, my father was very domineering so I couldn't express my feelings a lot. My father was a well-known doctor. He was actually an atheist, as I later discovered. So he didn't want us to pray or read the *Quran*, instead he wanted us to get educated in the field of science and become doctors or engineers. I spoke a bit to my mother but she was very religious and I did not like religious thinking as much because I would always ask questions. Like, 'why do I have to read or pray in Arabic? *Allah* knows everything so He should know Bengali! *Allah* claims He is merciful but He will throw them into hell who don't worship Him, He is then anything but great and merciful!' I never got a good answer to these questions so I never actually believed in religion. Initially I was agnostic and then I became an atheist, after reading all religious texts, including the *Quran*.

I began by writing poems and many people liked my writing. I got published in local literary magazines and I was really encouraged to write more. When I was seventeen, sometime in 1978, I started publishing my magazine as I had learnt publishing literary magazines from my elder

brother. My magazine was called *SeNjuti* in which I published both Bangladeshi and Bengali poets. Subsequently, my first poetry book was published in 1986 and the second was published in 1989, which sold very well. This led different newspapers reaching out to me to write columns for them. At that time, I was a doctor and I began writing these columns, which became very popular. They were about my story and my oppression as a woman, which many, many women related to. Many women wrote to the newspaper editors and me as well that I was writing their stories and I must not stop writing because these columns encouraged them to fight against their oppression. So, a well-known publisher published a collection of my articles, which received the *Ananda Award* in West Bengal in 1992, one of the most prestigious literary awards. This was a big encouragement for me to continue my writing.

I continued writing while working as a medical officer in a government hospital, *Dhaka Medical College Hospital*, whenever I could make time. I had to eventually quit my job because they imposed the condition that I could only write for medical journals and if I wrote anything else, I could only publish it after getting the government's approval. They even confiscated my passport when I was going to attend a literary program in Kolkata. My writing was controversial because I critically scrutinised Islam and Islamic oppression of women and also because I was simply writing against patriarchy and misogyny. I was also questioning the government for not protecting the ethnic minorities through my writing and I wanted laws based on equality and justice, not religion. I quit my job, only in protest, because government should not stop me from expressing my views. Private clinics did not employ me because they were so afraid as the protests against my writing had begun. There were demands of my execution by hanging, so no one was ready to employ me. Then I became a full-time writer and I ended up earning much more money as a writer than my job as a medical officer.

Which authors or books were your early formative influences?

I don't think I was completely influenced by any writer. I began by reading Bengali literature and translation of many international books in Bengali. When I had started writing on women's rights and oppression, I had not read feminist literature. After I had to leave my country and I went into exile in Europe, there I started reading about feminism, like writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Gloria Steinem, Robin Morgan. All the sixties and seventies feminists wrote exactly what I was already writing. They'd written about feminism much before I did but without even reading their work, I was writing pretty much the same thing. I asked Gloria Steinem one day that how could our writing be the same even though we wrote a decade apart and I wasn't even aware of her work. She told me that if you are aware of your rights, you don't need to read any books, you just need to listen to your intuition and the words will come to you. It is human nature. When I am attacked, I will fight. If I am whipped, I will snatch away the whip. You don't need to learn this from any book. The first question I asked, when I was very little, was that why do they get the freedom that I don't? A book didn't teach me to ask this question. I was always questioning everything around me, be it religion or the social system and the answer that I got was very stupid. It was, 'because you are a girl.' After I questioned what the difference between girls and boys was, I realised that it was a social difference that was artificially created. So, I protested against all kinds of injustices against women and defended human rights whenever I saw ethnic minorities being persecuted in my country. I did not learn all this from any book or anyone. I just did it because I believe that everyone should oppose the inequality faced by anyone.

What propelled you to write the sequel to *Lajja* through *Shameless*?

After I moved to Kolkata in 2004, sometime in 2006, I realised that since the Dutta family also moves to Kolkata by the end of *Lajja*. I could write about it now because I know Kolkata and I can imagine how their lives would turn out here.

Could you tell us a little bit about your writing process behind this book?

I don't actually think before I write. Many people tend to draw pictures or write summaries beforehand, et cetera. I don't do any of these things. I just go to my study, sit in front of my computer and write.

Taslima Nasreen is also a character in the book. What was your intention behind placing your authorial persona in the story?

There was no intention as such. I simply wrote that I, the writer, was living there too and that I met the character that I had created in fiction. I found it very interesting. It was a nice experience to meet the fictional characters I've created and also the fictional me. It was like a creative exercise. You don't see something like this happen in other books, writers don't generally write about themselves as a character in their books. Everything I write about myself in the book is true, like where I lived and that I have a cat or that I have police protection. Even the name of my maid is real. So in this way, both reality and fiction are intertwined in the book.

There are many thematic concerns at play in the book, ranging from migration, religious fanaticism to toxic masculinity and sexual politics. What, for you, was the main driving force while you were writing the book?

I think one of the most important issues was the lives of the women after moving from one country to another. You find that it is more or less the same. A girl could be raped in East Bengal and a girl can be raped in West Bengal as well. Another thing I show is that Maya, the daughter of the family, is raped by Muslims in Bangladesh and she is raped by Hindus in Kolkata. So a Hindu country is safe for Hindu girls is a myth. There is no country for girls or women. I believe that country means safety, if I don't feel secure in my country, then it is not my country. More or less, the patriarchy, the misogyny, the communalism, is same for them even in this country. This book is not really a political book. It is very personal and social. The end is very feminist.

What is the biggest challenge that you faced while writing the book?

The biggest challenge was the rape scene. The question that kept bothering me was whether I should write about it or not. I thought that, if it is a reality, if it actually happens in the society, then I would write about it. Ultimately, I did not write clearly about it and left it as a question mark. Did it happen and who did it? It depends on the reader to make their own conclusions. I had to really think a lot while phrasing it.

Also whenever I have described rape, cruelty and brutality, some people always call it pornographic. I have a book titled *Nimantran*, in which I showed that a very young girl falls in love with a boy who

ultimately, with his seven friends, rapes her brutally. When I described the brutality, everyone except the intellectual readers, started commenting that I write about sex, but it was about rape, it was about the torture. They don't see it as torture, they see it as sex. So, when I was writing about the rape in Shameless, I was writing about torture and I don't care what people call it.

What do you wish for your readers to take away from this book?

I was trying to show that nobody is perfectly good or bad. A person is made of both. It is not fixed that a certain person is hateful and bad. Sometimes that person is also good. This can be applied to more or less everyone. I tried to show the reality of human nature. No character is ideal. Everybody has faults and they have some niceties also. I want readers to think about this complexity of human nature.

If you had to give one advice to budding writers right now, what would that be?

I am nobody to give advice to writers. Writers should write whatever they want to write and however they want to write. I don't take anybody's advice so I don't give advice to anybody.

Lastly, what are you working on next?

Always new writing.

AWARDS

Taslima has received a number of international awards in recognition of her uncompromising demand for freedom of expression. Awards and Honours given to her include the following:

- Ananda literary Award, India, 1992
- Natyasava Award, Bangladesh, 1992
- Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thoughts from the European Parliament, 1994
- Human Rights Award from the Government of France, 1994
- Edict of Nantes Prize from France, 1994
- Kurt Tucholsky Prize, Swedish PEN, Sweden, 1994
- Hellman-Hammett Grant from Human Rights Watch, USA, 1994
- Humanist Award from Human-Etisk Forbund, Norway, 1994
- Feminist of the Year from Feminist Majority Foundation, USA, 1994
- Honorary Doctorate from Ghent University, Belgium, 1995
- Scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service, Germany, 1995
- Monismanien Prize from Uppsala University, Sweden, 1995
- Distinguished Humanist Award from International Humanist and Ethical Union, Great Britain, 1996
- Humanist Laureate from International Academy for Humanism, USA, 1996
- Ananda literary Award, India, 2000
- Global Leader for Tomorrow, World Economic Forum, 2000
- Erwin Fischer Award, International League of non-religious and atheists (IBKA), Germany, 2002
- Freethought Heroine Award, Freedom From Religion Foundation, USA, 2002

- Fellowship at Carr Centre for Human Rights Policy, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, USA, 2003
- UNESCO-Madanjeet Singh Prize for the promotion of tolerance and non-violence, 2004
- Honorary Doctorate from American University of Paris, 2005
- Grand Prix International Condorcet-Aron, 2005
- Sharatchandra literary award, West Bengal, India, 2006
- Honorary citizenship of Paris, France, 2008
- Simone de Beauvoir Prize, 2008
- Fellowship at New York University, USA, 2009
- Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, USA, 2009
- Feminist Press award, USA, 2009
- Medal of honour from the city of Lyon, France, 2009
- 'Fighting against Censorship' award, from Producciones Serrano, Bilbao, Spain, 2009
- Honorary Doctorate from Universite Catholique de Louvain, Belgium, 2011
- Honorary Citizenship from Esch, Luxembourg, 2011
- Honorary Citizenship from Metz, France, 2011
- Honorary Citizenship from Thionville, France, 2011
- Honorary Doctorate from Paris Diderot University, Paris, France, 2011
- Universal Citizenship Passport. From Paris, France, 2013
- Academy award from the Royal Academy of Arts, Science and Literature, Belgium, 2013, 2013
- Ingemar Hedenius Award, 2014
- 'Emperor Has No Clothes Award', Freedom From Religion Foundation, USA, 2015

(😊)(😊)(😊(😊)(😊)

The Enigmatic Taslima Nasrin

A Life of Controversy and Literary Brilliance

A Birthday Tribute

Honoring the Courage and Conviction of Taslima Nasrin

Author

Golam Rob

Today, August 25, marks the birthday of Taslima Nasrin, a Bangladeshi-Swedish-Indian writer, physician, and human rights activist. She has been at the center of controversy for decades. Taslima's unapologetic writings have sparked intense debates, protests, and even death threats. As we celebrate her special day, let's take a closer look into the life of this complex and fascinating individual.

Taslima Nasrin began her literary career in the 1980s by writing poetry and essays that critiqued Bangladesh's patriarchal society and religious fundamentalism. While her bold and unflinching words resonated with many, they also drew the ire of religious extremists and conservative groups.

Her autobiographical book, 'Lajja' (Shame), published in 1993, was a scathing critique of the treatment of Hindus in Bangladesh, leading to widespread protests and death threats. The controversy surrounding her work arises from its provocative nature, often challenging deeply held beliefs and societal norms.

Taslima's steadfast dedication to free speech and refusal to yield in adversity have come at a high personal cost. In 1994, she was compelled to leave Bangladesh after a fatwa was issued against her, and shehas since resided in exile, predominantly in India and Sweden. Despite the threats and persecution, Taslima persists in writing, her words piercing the shroud of silence and questioning the existing state of affairs.

In 1994, she was compelled to leave Bangladesh after a fatwa was issued against her and has since resided in exile, predominantly in India and Sweden. Despite the threats and persecution, Taslima persists in writing, her words piercing the shroud of silence and questioning the existing state of affairs.

A Global Outcast?

Taslima's controversial writings have caused her to be ostracized in many countries. Governments have been embarrassed by her presence, and protests have erupted in cities worldwide, demanding her expulsion. For instance, in 2007, a protest in Kolkata, India, called for her deportation due to her critical views on Islam, and she was eventually forced to leave the city. Today, she lives a reclusive life, and her whereabouts are unknown to the public.

Literary Brilliance Amidst Controversy

Despite the controversy that surrounds her, Taslima's literary talent is undeniable. Her writing, praised for its lyricism, depth, and unflinching honesty, has sparked crucial conversations about human rights, gender equality, and religious tolerance. Her ability to retain readers is a testament to her skill as a storyteller, her unwavering commitment to her craft, and her significant impact on these crucial issues.

A Delusional Mind or a Visionary?

Some have criticized Taslima's writings as delusional or distorted, a product of a troubled mind. Others see her as a visionary, a courageous voice in a world where free speech is increasingly threatened. The criticism often concerns her bold and provocative style, which some find unsettling. Whatever one's opinion, it is impossible to deny the profound impact of her words on the global literary landscape.

A Birthday Wish

As we celebrate Taslima Nasrin's birthday, we stand in awe of her courage to continue writing, challenge the norms, and inspire future generations. May her words spark debates, ignite passions, and inspire change. May she, too, find peace and solace in a world that has often been hostile to her presence.

Happy birthday, Taslima Nasrin. Your words will not be silenced.

(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)

LAJJA

[Shame]

by

Dr Taslima Nasrin

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365728086_Taslima_Nasrin_Lajja_Shame]

Taslima Nasrin's Lajja was published in 1993 and translated into English by Tutul Gupta as Shame in 1994. Written in the wake of the demolition of the sixteenth-century Babri Masjid in 1992, the novel depicts the atrocities of Bangladeshi Muslim fundamentalists against the Hindu minority of the country. One of the principles of the Bangladesh constitution is secularism, and it is therefore committed to communal harmony where people from four communities – Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian – live peacefully. After the 1947 Partition, however, there have been several eruptions of hostility against Hindus, and Nasrin draws attention to the intolerance of the anti-Hindu riots. As a result, Lajja was banned and Nasrin received death threats from Islamic groups.

Nasrin begins Lajja with the note "let another name for religion be humanism" and dedicates the book "To the people of Indian Subcontinent". The novel is centred on the Hindu Dutta family: Sudhamoy and his wife, Kironmoyee, their son, Suranjan, and daughter, Maya. When the communal riots start in Bangladesh, in reaction to the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Sudhamoy continues to believe that his motherland will not let him down. Suranjan dislikes communalism both in Bangladesh and in India. He observes that there is a similarity between the Jamaat-e-Islami, an Islamist political party in Bangladesh which strongly opposed the independence of Bangladesh and the break-up of Pakistan in 1971, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India.

Communal riots occurred under British rule and continued after India was divided into India and Pakistan, even in independent, secular

Bangladesh. The narrator of Lajja comments: "The British had understood all too well, that if they wanted to perpetuate their presence in the subcontinent, it would be necessary to further enflame the existing feelings of ill-will between Hindus and Muslims". The policy of "Divide and Rule" facilitated communal tension. The division between the two major religions became more visible in 1947, when the subcontinent was separated into India and Pakistan. Many Hindus migrated to India from East Bengal / East Pakistan while Indian Muslims shifted to East Pakistan.

The vision of the Liberation War was to form a non-communal, secular Bangladesh. The narrator comments, "The State of Bangladesh was founded on the basis of four major principles: nationalism, secularism, democracy, and socialism". After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and members of his extended family on 15 August of 1975, Bangladesh faced an unstable political situation and a revival of an anti-Hindu sentiment which had been behind the Two-Nation Theory that led to Partition. In 1978, the words "Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim" [In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful] were inserted in the constitution.

Lajja highlights the growth of an Islamic, anti-Hindu sentiment in Bangladesh: "As the Babri Masjid had been destroyed by Hindu fanatics it would be the Hindus in Bangladesh who would have to suffer". When the riots begin, Suranjan and his family obtain temporary protection in the homes of his friends Kamal, Belal, and Haider. Suranjan observes the looting, plundering, and burning of Hindu houses. His family feels threatened. A procession passes in front of their house and Suranjan, Sudhamoy, and Kironmoyee hear some of the processionists saying, "Let us catch a Hindu or two, eat them in the mornings and evenings too". Haripada Bhattacharya, a visitor, tells Sudhamoy, "The puja office on North Brook Road, the idol of Kali in thezamindar's house as well as the temple were all destroyed completely [. . .] In Kushtia, six temples were attacked at midnight by the Jamaat Shibeer people". The reference is to the Islami Chhatra Shibir, an Islamist student organization based in Bangladesh and established in 1977. (In her translation of the novel,

Tutul Gupta spells the word "Shibeer".) Sudhamoy feels a pain in his chest and the narrator comments, "It was an old, recurring ache" (11). Sudhamoy thinks about the recurrence of religious intolerance, bloodshed, migration, and violence in 1947, 1964, 1974, 1981, 1986, 1990, and 1992. Kironmoyee's father – who had left for India in the wake of Partition – writes about the agony of migrants in a letter to his daughter, "We were not happy to leave our country either, but we were compelled to do so".

Sudhamoy remembers how his relatives had told his father: "Sukumar, come, let us go away. This is the homeland of the Muslims. Life is uncertain in this country". Sudhamoy observes that Sukanto Chattopadhyaya, Sudhanshu Haldar, Nirmalendu Bhowmick, and Ranjan Chakraborty left the country. He is angry as he sees "The exodus of 1947 [. . .] being repeated". However, he understands the reason for their departure when Pakistani soldiers open his lungi to see whether he is circumcised. In the camp he is forced to read the kalma [the Islamic profession of faith] to convert to Islam. As he refused to call himself a Muslim, they tormented him and "One day, after Sudhamoy had again thwarted their efforts, they jerked up his lungi, and mutilated his penis". He observed that many Hindus who had read the kalma to convert to Islam were still brutally killed. Sudhamoy is, however, spared, perhaps "because he had been 'converted' so radically" (66). He was thrown out of the camp and somehow managed to return home. Sudhamoy's dream of living in Bangladesh peacefully is shattered.

In 1971, Kironmoyee was asked by her Muslim friends to convert and since 1975 she stopped wearing the sankha [a conch shell bangle] and putting sindur [vermilion powder] in her parting, both of which identify a married Hindu woman. The novel brings the issue of minority repression to the forefront of the national debate in the 1990s. When Suranjan goes out one day, a group of boys say, "Catch him, he's a Hindu". He feels ashamed when everyone warns him not to go out and advises him to hide his Hindu identity. Communal harmony is destroyed and

inter-religious marriages are forbidden. Though Maya loves a Muslim boy Jahangir and Suranjan loves Parveen, they cannot marry.

Suranjan wants to preserve communal harmony, if necessary, by stopping visible signs of difference. When Maya performs a puja, Suranjan scolds her, "Why can't you just be a normal human being? You must stop behaving like a Hindu". Culture is an important part of a country and Suranjan reveals how Hindus have accepted Islamic culture and adopted Muslim words in Bangla. He does not hesitate "to say Assalaam Aleikum,Khuda Hafiz, paani instead of jal, and gosol instead of snan". Sudhamoy has no prejudice about religion and Suranjan considers his father as an extraordinary human being, "someone with so much honesty, simplicity, purity of thought and deed, love, and above all so strong a sense of secularism and dislike for communalism". When Suranjan was a boy, a classmate named Khaled had rebuked him as "Hindu" and Suranjan realized that "Hindu" was a word of hatred. Maya was also harassed in school because of her Hindu identity. Sudhamoy attempted to teach Suranjan and Maya humanism. He told Maya, "You are a human being. There is nothing superior to that".

However, things change. Sudhamoy hears people in the procession scream, "Naraye takbir, Allahu Akbar" [Shoutout loud, Allah is the greatest, Allah is the greatest]. They threaten Hindus, and tell them to leave the country if they want to survive. Seven young men enter into their house and one boy says, "Did you think youcould get away after destroying Babri Masjid?". Some young Muslim fanatics abduct Maya from their house and rape her. R. Kothaikani and G. Sathurappasamy note that Nasrin depicts in Lajja how women are sexually harassed, abducted and subjected to many kinds of torture that may even end with their death. The novelist demonstrates how the abduction of Hindu girls has been common in Bangladesh and how the thugs do not have any kind of fear. Whenever they wished, they would abduct a woman and rape her brutally.

Finally, Suranjan begins to consider himself a Hindu and he rapes a Muslim prostitute named Shamima as revenge. He forgets his humanistic ideals.

Shame is a good translation and the language is lucid. However, the translator has added extra material about the various incidents that took place in Bangladesh after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, with dates and figures. Partly as a result of these additions, Shame is a longer novel than Lajja – the original has six chapters, whereas Shame has thirteen. The original and the translated version also differ in other particulars. For example, in the translation, Chapter 3 begins thus: "The winter chill wasn't as penetrating as it usually was and Suranjan shoved aside his quilt". In the Bangla original Chapter 3 starts with Haidar coming to Suranjan's house to find out how he and his family are. The same discrepancy may be noted in other chapters as well. However, at the end of both Lajja and Shame, Sudhamoy realizes that the family cannot stay in Bangladesh and tells Suranjan that they must go to India.

And his voice cracked as the shame swept over him. But he had said it, he had forced it out, he had compelled himself to say that they would go; and he had realized that that was the way it would have to be because the strong mountain that he had built within himself was crumbling day by day.

Nasrin focuses on the absence of humanist decency among fanatics in Lajja. In an essay "Chutmargo" translated as "Untouchability", Kazi Nazrul Islam writes, "any religion that teaches hate for others cannot be a religion whatever else it might be". Religion teaches truth and love. Hate creates an obstacle for the peaceful coexistence of different communities. In a review of the novel, P. R. Dubashi comments: "The Lajja is of 'indecency' and perversion of humanity. Taslima is a proud Bengali – proud of her beautiful Bengali cultural heritage, and for her the indecency is a blot on Bengali heritage".

Works Cited

01] Dubashi, P.R. "Taslima Nasrin's Lajja: A True Assessment." The Indian Journal of Political Science 57.1/4(1996): 115-20.

02] Islam, Kazi Nazrul. "Untouchability," translated by Debjani Sengupta. Kazi Nazrul Islam: Selections 2, edited by Niaz Zaman. Dhaka: writers.ink, 2020.

03] Kothaikani, R., and G. Sathurappasamy. "Portrayal of Women in Taslima Nasreen's Lajja." Language in India19.3 (2019): 100-04.

04] Nasrin, Taslima. Lajja. 1993. People's Book Society, 2002.--. Shame, translated by Tutul Gupta. Penguin Books, 1994

****

(PDF) Taslima Nasrin: Lajja [Shame]. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365728086_Taslima_Nasrin_Lajja_Shame [accessed Sep 03 2024].

Citation: Islam, Rama. "Lajja ". The Literary Encyclopedia. First published 21 December 2020[https://www.litencyc.com, accessed 25 November 2022.]

This article is copyright to © The Literary Encyclopedia.

All entries, data and software copyright © The Literary Dictionary Company Limited

ISSN 1747-678X

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Book Review

LAJJA

by

Tanisha Venkani
[Madam Panda]

{https://tanishavenkani.wordpress.com/2020/01/27/book-review-lajja-by-taslima-nasrin/}

About the Author:

Taslima Nasrin is a Swedish-Bangladeshi author, human rights activist, and a youth icon who's written brave accounts of oppression of women and the evil face of communalism. This book is important for me because it was banned in Bangladesh and remains a very critical text, decades later. According to Taslima Nasrin, a Fatwa was issued against her as since it became very apparent how the state failed in protecting its citizens under the garb of religion.

Lajja – The Evil of Communalism

This book took me back to a line from Ravish Kumar's 'The Free Voice' that says "In the drawing rooms of the elite, communal talk is already like a dessert after a good meal". This line has become more relatable and been reinforced after completing the book.

Of late, a lot of political narratives involve religious ideologies and religion-based atrocities. On the one hand, there are all kinds of accounts around social issues of oppression and human rights violation. One of the important points of discussion has also been the interference of state with religion to run a democracy. These issues are, in depth, evidently and subtly, covered by one of the very courageous authors Taslima Nasrin in her book Lajja.

In 1992 in India, Babri Masjid was demolished which followed riots in the country and a lot of unrest. However, the ripples of that demolition spread through the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. The book talks about the situation on ground of how the Bengali Hindus faced atrocities as a response to the agitation of the Muslims in Bangladesh over the incident in back in India. The story revolves around the Duttas, who have lived in Bangladesh throughout. It's the accounts of Suronjon, Sudhamoy, Maya, and Kironmoyee Dutta who found it difficult with the tag of being a 'Hindu'.

Sudhamoy and Suronjon were politically vocal, didn't subscribe to the idea of religious fundamentalism and were liberals. Sudhamoy was also a part of the famous Liberation War of 1971.

The story starts with how things started to turn a drastic turn after the unfortunate incident of the Babri Masjid demolition took place in October 1992. It's about how the Muslims of Bangladesh took the streets and unleashed violence in the city – killing and lynching almost anyone who looked Hindu or had a Hindu name, raping and killing women, destroying properties belonging to Hindus and asking them to leave the country if they wanted to survive.

Sudhamoy and Kironmoyee always had conflicting opinions of moving to India to save themselves from any harm. Kironmoyee wanted to move as most of her family was in India and it would only provide them a little more certainty in life. However, her husband Sudhamoy was never fond of the idea. For him, Bangladesh was his country and he wanted to live in the country that is his. He seemed fairly optimistic about staying in Bangladesh. He would say that the unrest would soon end and that this is his country as much as it is of any Muslim's.

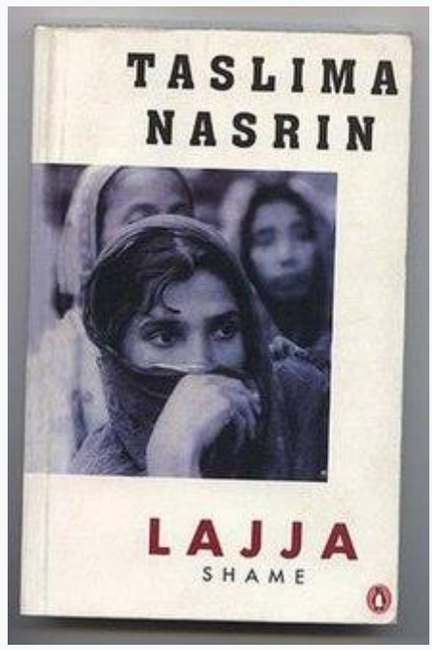
Lajja is a brave book that talks about the struggles the Dutta family had to go through to prove their nationalism. The entire book explores the story of the four central characters and how their political ideologies get influenced by the violence in the country.

Lajja is a fast read and for someone who reads often, it should be done in a week as well. Taslima's writing is simple and clear. Her subtle hints at religious fundamentalism, gender oppression, and the idea of nationalism make this book worth the money and the time spent on it.

I would recommend this book 8/10 for it is still relevant after decades of the horrific incident that shook the Indian subcontinent, with ripple effects in Bangladesh and maybe many other countries.

(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)

Lajja



Author	Taslima Nasrin
Language	Bengali
Genre	Novel
Publication date	1993
Publication place	Bangladesh
Published in English	October 1997
Media type	Print (Hardback & Paperback)
Pages	302
ISBN	1-57392-165-3
OCLC	37322498
Dewey Decimal	891.4/437 21
LC Class	PK1730.3.A65 L3513 1997

Empowering and Bold

A Tribute to "Lajja"

by Taslima Nasrin

https://maheshspacey.quora.com/Empowering-and-Bold-A-Tribute-to-Lajja-by-Taslima-Nasrin

Lajja, authored by the fearless Taslima Nasrin, is an incredibly powerful and thought-provoking novel that dares to address sensitive and crucial issues head-on. This literary masterpiece deserves to be celebrated for its courage, honesty, and unyielding commitment to human rights.

From the very first page, Lajja captures the reader's attention with its gripping narrative and raw emotions. Nasrin masterfully weaves a tale of a family struggling to cope with the aftermath of communal violence, showcasing the resilience and determination of the Bangladeshi Hindu community. This poignant portrayal of the repercussions of religious intolerance is a wakeup call for society to foster unity and embrace diversity.

Through the eyes of the protagonist, Nasrin highlights the suffering and struggles faced by minority communities, offering a voice to those often silenced in the face of adversity. Her ability to paint vivid and unforgettable characters brings to life the emotions, fears, and hopes of the victims, leaving a lasting impact on readers worldwide.

Nasrin's writing is both elegant and evocative, drawing the reader into the heart of the story. Her courage to challenge societal norms and confront taboos is truly commendable, as she uses her pen as a tool for social change. Lajja forces us to

reflect on the importance of religious tolerance and encourages us to stand up against bigotry and hatred in all its forms.

Furthermore, Lajja's exploration of the role of women in society is empowering and relevant. By depicting the struggles faced by women in a patriarchal world, Nasrin encourages us to break free from restrictive gender norms and advocate for gender equality.

This novel is not just a work of fiction; it serves as a catalyst for dialogue and understanding among communities. It ignites conversations about the importance of coexistence, compassion, and the protection of human rights for all.

In the face of adversity, Taslima Nasrin has fearlessly fought for the freedom of expression and the rights of oppressed communities. Lajja is a testament to her unwavering commitment to truth and justice. This literary gem serves as an inspiration to countless individuals, urging them to raise their voices against injustice and advocate for a more inclusive and harmonious world.

In conclusion, "Lajja" by Taslima Nasrin is a masterpiece that deserves to be celebrated for its bravery, thoughtfulness, and literary brilliance. It is a timeless reminder that literature can be a powerful tool for change and that the pursuit of truth and justice knows no boundaries. This novel should be cherished and celebrated for generations to come.

Catalogue
of
BOOKS

[https://www.taslimanasrin.com/all-the-books/]

Poetry

- *Shikore Bipul Khudha* (Hunger in the Roots), 1982
- *Nirbashito Bahire Ontore* (Banished Without and Within), 1989
- *Amar Kichu Jay Ashe Ne* (I Couldn't Care Less), 1990
- *Atole Ontorin* (Captive in the Abyss), 1991
- *Balikar Gollachut* (Game of the Girls), 1992
- *Behula Eka Bhashiyechilo Bhela* (Behula Floated the Raft Alone), 1993
- *Ay Kosto Jhepe, Jibon Debo Mepe* (Pain Come Roaring Down, I'll Measure Out My Life for You), 1994
- *Nirbashito Narir Kobita* (Poems From Exile), 1996
- *Jolpodyo* (Waterlilies), 2000
- *Khali Khali Lage* (Feeling Empty), 2004
- *Kicchukhan Thako* (Stay for a While), 2005
- *Bhalobaso? Cchai baso* (It's your love! or a heap of trash!), 2007
- *Bondini* (Prisoner), 2008

Essay collections

- *Nirbachito Column* (*Selected Columns*), 1990
- *Jabo na keno? jabo* (I will go; why won't I?), 1991
- *Noshto meyer noshto goddo* (Fallen prose of a fallen girl), 1992
- *ChoTo choTo dukkho kotha* (Tale of trivial sorrows), 1994
- *Narir Kono Desh Nei* (Women have no country), 2007
- *Nishiddho* (Forbidden),2014
- *Taslima Nasreener Godyo Podyo (Taslima Nasreen's prose and poetry), 2015*

Novels

- *Oporpokkho* (*The Opponent*), 1992.
- *Shodh*, 1992. ISBN 978-81-88575-05-3. Trans. in English as *Getting Even*.
- *Nimontron* (*Invitation*), 1993.
- *Phera* (*Return*), 1993.
- *Lajja*, 1993. ISBN 978-0-14-024051-1. Trans. in English as *Shame*.
- *Bhromor Koio Gia* (*Tell Him The Secret*), 1994.
- *Forashi Premik* (*French Lover*), 2002.
- *Shorom* (*Shame Again*), 2009.

Short stories

- *Dukkhoboty meye* (Sad girls), 1994
- *Minu*, 2007

Autobiography

- *Amar Meyebela* (*My girlhood*), 1997
- *Utal Hawa* (*Wild Wind*), 2002
- *Ka* (*Speak Up*), 2003; published in West Bengal as *Dwikhondito* (*Split-up in Two*), 2003
- *Sei Sob Andhokar* (*Those Dark Days*), 2004
- *Ami Bhalo Nei, Tumi Bhalo Theko Priyo Desh* ("I am not okay, but you stay well my beloved homeland"), 2006.
- *Nei, Kichu Nei* (*Nothing is there*), 2010
- *Nirbasan* (*Exile*), 2012.

Taslima's Banned Books

"Come what may, I will continue my fight for equality and justice without any compromise until my death. Come what may, I will never be silenced."

Several of Taslima's books have been banned, both in Bangladesh and in West Bengal.

The following books in the People's Republic of Bangladesh have been banned. Therefore, people in that people's republic are not allowed to read these books. It was banned in Bangladesh, even in India it has been partly censored. The book is available in this site, Now, wherever you are you can read the entirely uncensored version of the book.

1. Lajja (Shame), 1993

Lajja is banned by the Government of Bangladesh

2. Amar Meyebela (My girlhood), 1999

Banned by the Government of Bangladesh

- "Bangladesh bans new Taslima book," BBC News, 13 August 1999
- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared Amar Meyebela pornography
- "L'ffaire Taslima Nareen ou la parole à la Censeure," 1 October 1999

3.Utal Hawa (Gusty Wind), 2002

Utal Hawa is banned by the Government of Bangladesh

- Book Bans
- Bangladesh Bans Third Taslima Book, BBC News, August 27, 2002
- Book banned for attack on Islam
- Utal Hawa banned
- Taslima's new book also goes Lajja way
- Book Banned
- "Nasreen contre l'islam" 31 August 20

4. Ko (Speak up), 2003

Ko is banned by the High Court of Bangladesh.

- Suit against Taslima Nasreen

- Injunction on selling of Taslima's book
- Ko (ka) is banned
- Taslima's Ka erupts sexual controversy
- Split wide closed
- Book banned at behest of Islamic bigots
- Taslima's opinion

5. Dwikhandito, 2003

The book was banned by the 'Communist' Government of West Bengal of India on the charges of hurting religious feelings of the people. The book was also banned by the High Court of West Bengal.

- Ban on Taslima's Dwikhandita
- Ban On Dwikhandita Justified
- Dwikhandita banned
- Hypocrisy split wide open
- Protest book ban
- Ban on Taslima
- Bengal Bans Taslima's book
- Brickbats for Ban
- WB Govt Bans Taslima's Book
- Banning Taslima's Book
- Opinions

6. Sei Sob Ondhokar, 2004

The fourth part of the autobiography was banned on the 20th of February, one day before Language Day, a big national day for Bengali language and literature. No one protested the ban, according to several news sources:

- Another Taslima Book Banned Daily Star, 20 February 2004
- Book banned at behest of Islamic bigots

Taslima's other books are not so easy to find in the bookshops in Bangladesh. The once best-selling author's works are now taboo in her own country.

Taslima, who is against all censorship anywhere, has chosen an inspiring solution. On 16 December 2003 (appropriately the anniversary of Bangladesh's independence in 1971) she has put Dwikhandito in Bengali as well as Amar Meyebela. Amar Meyebela in Bengali on the worldwide web for everyone to read, whether they live in a country that does not respect freedom of expression or in a country that does.

Latest News :
High Court lifted the ban on Dwikhandito in September 2005. The book would not be available on the net.
Taslima's Reaction after Dwikhandito ban (Bengali)
Indian Communist party defends the banning of the book
Communists statement for banning the book

Vajira, who is also a painter, poet and lyricist, has previously come into conflict with the Sinhala Buddhist hierarchy over his artistic work. The Peoples Alliance government has also banned one of his songs from state radio broadcasts. The song, which calls for freedom of artistic expression, is about Taslima Nasrin, the

exiled Bangladeshi writer whose award-winning book has been banned in Bangladesh and in Sri Lanka. Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh have issued a fatwa or death sentence against Nasrin.

Sri-Lanka Story

Click on the following regarding the harm of censorship
Censorship Myths and Imagined Harms
Condemns Censorship

Facts:

- Taslima's columns have been constantly censored by the editors of the newspapers.
- Taslima's books are censored by the publishers.
- Taslima is a taboo in many countries.
- Taslima is blacklisted in media that controlled by the Governments and the conservatives.
- Taslima is blacklisted by the politicians who use religion to get votes from the Muslims.
- Taslima herself is banned in Bangladesh. She is prevented by the Government to enter her own country, because she expressed her views that are different from the views of the fanatics.
- (Most of the) Publishers are afraid to publish her books. Book sellers are afraid to sell her books. Supporters are afraid to support her publicly. Secularists are afraid to defend her when she is attacked by the religious fundamentalists.
- Her books have been pirated. Ninety percent publishers do not pay any royalty to the author.

Following is only a few of the sites that show reviews of books by Taslima Nasrin.

Revenge

- Los Angeles Times has selected Revenge for summer reading 2010
- Feminist press
- Review
- Amazon.com
- Fantasticfiction.com

Libres de le dire (Free to Speak)

- Review Le Monde, Liberation, Critiques Libres, Contre-feux, Contre-dits,
- Revolution, facebook, Best seller list
- Watch LCI, France 24, TV5, Canal +, France2 *1, France2*2 , France culture,

Meyebela, My Bengali Girlhood

Los Angeles Times Selected Meyebela as One of the Best Books of 2002

"Meyebela" ends at the threshold of this realization. It will be many years until the quiet young girl will find the voice and the heart to commit blasphemy and earn a fatwa or two. Her courage is all the more stunning to those who have lived under

the reign of silence that pervades the Muslim world, who have seen how not only men but also very often women join in the effort to perpetuate fear and violence against other females, how a dissenting voice, a rebel mind, is quickly reformed or purged.

23 November 2002

GLOBE AND MAIL, Canada selected Meyebela, one of the best books of 2002 Nasrin tells the often harrowing story of her journey from birth to adolescence. It was necessary for her to create new language to denote this passage, as none existed in her native tongue. The Bengali term for childhood is chelebela: boy-time. Meyebela, an act of radical linguistics, means girl-time.

..The truth, as Nasrin and a handful of other brave souls have dared to utter, is that not all traditions are worthy of keeping, that not all long-held principles are equally valid. Not every word written in a holy book—any holy book—is indeed holy. Not every attempt to bring enlightenment to the shadows of ignorance can be dismissed as 'cultural imperialism.'..Review

Los Angeles Times

Taslima Nasrin had intimate knowledge of her adversary. Unlike Salman Rushdie, to whom she is often compared, she did not write from the safety of exile or without foreknowledge of the consequences. She was weaned on the particular brand of fanaticism taking hold in post-war Bangladesh. She had grown up clutching the skirts of her increasingly pious mother, who dragged her to the colony of a local charismatic teacher where, with cult-like devotion, women would taste the contents of his spittoon. And she would herself be forced into the cage of the burqa when the maturing body robbed her of what little freedom she enjoyed as a girl. Review

Globe and Mail

Taslima Nasrin, the fiery feminist from Bangladesh who angered the Muslim clergy in her country by questioning the Koran and writing about sexuality, has written a brutally honest and brave memoir of her childhood to the age of 14. Review
Washington Post

Her autobiography, Meyebela ("girlhood" in Bengali), is a richly detailed story of a traditional upbringing amid difficult change…..She became a woman both of controversy and spirit, seeking to heal not only physical but also social ills, regardless of their origin.. Review
USA Today

I believe Nasrin's Meyebela will, like Huckleberry Finn, become a classic of controversy, hated, loved, banned, made a school text, removed from the schools and fought over as long as people read. But there is an important difference between the two books. Huckleberry Finn is a novel, and, though it has a first-person narrator, there is a clear distance between Huck, the character, a believer who will do what's right even if it means he has to go to hell, and Twain, the secular-humanist author, who is using Huck to show the hypocrisy of religion. In Meyebela, there is no authorial stance distinct from that of the narrator; the voice is that of the young Taslima as she comes to hate religion and blame God for the cruelties of

man. Because all the author's stories, and all her conclusions, are told in the voice of an angry, rebellious, imaginative child, some may feel they are simplistic. But even those who long for more distance must recognize that Meyebela's bravery, vividness and groundbreaking subject matter make it a remarkable achievement, and one that will live. Review
The Nation

Meyebela is a rather straightforward book, reminiscent of work by Egypt's Nawal El Saadawi (also a full-time doctor and activist). While there are more poetic works, such as Fatima Mernissi's Dreams of Trespass, Tales of a Harem Girlhood, this memoir belongs on the shelf with those of Dorothy Allison, Alice Walker, and others who have pried open doors locked on shattered girlhoods. Review
Village Voice

This moving memoir attempts to demonstrate how it is possible for young women to reach within themselves and nurture their own spiritual life in spite of the physical and emotional pain that men — and tradition-bound societies — can inflict upon them. Review
Indolink

Nasrin writes hauntingly of a childhood of confusion and pain. Review
Publishers Weekly

Nasrin in her memoir tells us what life truly is like for many girls around the world. It is our duty to listen. It is sad though that we can often do little more than be outraged. Review
Desi Journal

If her countrymen want her dead, you know her writings must be exceptionally good, must be enormously powerful, and must be terribly threatening to the existing institution of male domination and patriarchy… Review
APA Book

My Girlhood

But Nasreen is no Rushdie (although they can be compatible spiritual allies). However, the story she seeks to put before us is so deliciously conflicted that it, like an unwiped teardrop, can head only one way: towards the heart. Review
Outlook India

my girlhood speaks of the simplicity and natural delight in things that one is accustomed to right from childhood. These are the rightful staple of existence of every child. To rob one of these, is to nullify one's entity. The unwarranted, forced precocious ness bestowed upon the girl by ugly 'snakes' is just as deplorable as the bloody operatic of war being played out in the nation at large. The book's transferring gaze explores the social, religious, cultural ethos, and each is commented upon lavishly. Review
Hindustani Times

HONESTY is always disconcerting. Children are good at it, until they learn deceit from their elders. The child remains in the woman, but the woman soon internalises the message that being a good girl means not talking about certain things. Taslima

Nasrin, in the consensus opinion of those who presume to judge her, is not a good girl Review

The Hindu

It is commonly said that Taslima Nasrin is an overrated writer. This notion is so strong that it is repeated unthinkingly by people who can neither read nor write Bengali! It is also said that her books sell because of their explicit discussion of sex and sexuality. (Usually such an allegation says something about the reader but nothing about the writer.) Future generations will not dispute that Nasrin has been one of the most important Bengali writers of contemporary times. Moving away from ornate and euphemistic rhetoric, Taslima Nasrin deploys language that is direct, even ruthless. Her feminist politics emerges not out of victomolgy but rage. Her sexual explicitness is daring and unembarrassed. These traits are neither traditionally feminine nor desirable by Bengali canonical standards. Therefore, her writings assail the canon itself and problematizes the notion of what constitutes "literary merit".Review Biblio

The pictures emerge like flashes from a colourful kaleidoscope, creating a brilliant image as the author moves back and forth between her own life and that of a fledgling nation. A child like innocence and freshness pervades her sharp observations of Bangladeshi society with its class discriminations and bias, its blatant gender disparities and growing religious orthodoxy and intolerance. Her account is as much a personal record as it is a chronicle of political events in the life of nation. Review Vedams

Amar Meyebela

Writing the self: Taslima Nasrin's autobiography and the silent voices of Bengali

feminism. Review

Which is the most debatable book in recent years in Bengali Literature?
'Aamar Meyebela'(My Girlhood) by Taslima Nasreen. No doubt about it.

Which is the most open, forthright, straightforward and honest autobiography in Bengali Literature?
'Aamar Meyebela' by Taslima Nasreen. No doubt about it.

Which book has hurt the soft and suppressed Bengali emotions and sensitivities the most?
'Aamar Meyebela' by Taslima Nasreen. No doubt about it. Review

the most debatable book for years in Bengali Literature, Net Guru India

She will call a spade a spade, come what may.
The Tribune Review

Enfance,au feminin

1. French Review
2. Express Review

Shodh

"The Ecstatic Female Body in the Contemporary Bangladeshi Novels of Taslima Nasrin," by Saiyeda Khatun in Genders 1999

A good book

The Game in Reverse

1. Aubrey review
2. CHris Lott Review

French Lover

- Dawn Review
- The Hindu Literary Review
- Parabaas Review
- Vedams Review
- The Tribune Review

La Hermana De Nupur

- Seiz Barral Review
- Spanish Review

Ka

- Review A cry against a book
- Review Banned again
- Review has no lajja about Ka

Lajja

- la republique des lettres review
- Review
- peace-magazine review
- mouthshut review
- Kompas review
- Rada Ivekovic review

Dwikhandito

- Bengali Review

Selected Columns

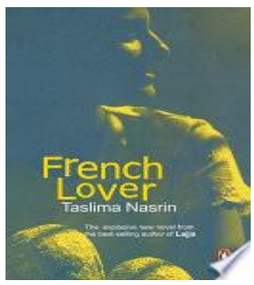
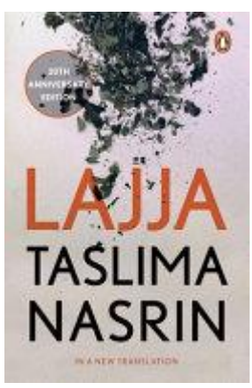
- Tribune Review
- German Review

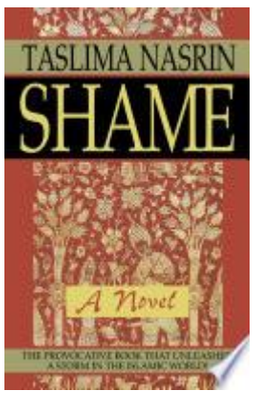
Vent en rafales

- Vent en rafales review

  Shame again is published in Malayalam language in India
  The Hindu Review

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

	Description: French Lover is the story of Nilanjana, a young Bengali woman from Kolkata who moves to Paris after getting married to Kishanlal, a restaurant owner. Kishanlal's luxurious apartment seems to be a gilded cage for Nilanjana, and she feels stifled within its friendless confines. Her marriage, where she functions as little more than a housekeeper and sex object, is far from fulfilling and Nilanjana desperately looks for a way out of the boredom and depression that threaten to engulf her. It is at this point that she meets Benoir Dupont, a blond, blue-eyed handsome Frenchman, and is swept off her feet. Benoir introduces Nilanjana to the streets, cafes and art galleries of Paris. In her passionate, sexually liberating relationship with Benoir, she finally begins to have an inkling of her own desires. The relationship ends when Nilanjana realises that Benoir's first priority is himself and not the woman he loves, and that her need for him has ended. But her road to self-discovery has only just begun. Bold in concept and powerful in execution, French Lover is a fascinating glimpse into the workings of a woman's mind as she struggles to come to terms with her identity in a hostile world.
	Description: The Dattas have lived in Bangladesh all their lives. Despite being members of a small Hindu community, they refuse to leave the country. And then, on 6 December 1992, the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya is demolished by a mob of Hindu fundamentalists. The nightmare inevitably arrives at the Dattas' doorstep, and their world begins to fall apart. Lajja, the controversial novel by Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin, is a savage indictment of religious extremism and man's inhumanity to man. Unremittingly dark and menacing, the novel exposes the mindless bloodthirstiness of fundamentalism and brilliantly captures the insanity of violence in out time. This was translated from the Bengali by Tutul Gupta. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lajja_(novel)
	Description: Between husbands and wives, sometimes revenge is the best way to get even.
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

	'Nasrin's voice is the voice of humanism everywhere.' Wole Soyinka 'Taslima Nasrin has spoken out about the oppression of women under Islam, and what she's said needed saying.' Salman Rushdie Revenge is a delicious novel about getting even from one of the most controversial and internationally acclaimed writers of her generation. In modern Bangladesh, Jhumur marries for love and imagines life with her husband, Haroon, will continue much as it did when they were dating on her university campus. But once she crosses the threshold of Haroon's family home, Jhumur finds she is expected to be the traditional Muslim wife: head covered, eyes averted, and unable to leave the house without an escort. When she becomes pregnant, Jhumur is shocked to discover that Haroon doesn't believe the baby is his. Overwhelmed by his mistrust, Jhumur plots her Revenge in the arms of a handsome neighbor. Readers from every walk of life will be stunned by this tale of love, lust, and blood ties. Taslima Nasrin, an award winning writer and human rights activist, is known for her powerful writing on women's oppression and unflinching criticisms of Islam, despite forced exile and multiple fatwa calling for her death. In India and Bangladesh, Nasrin's fiction, poetry, memoirs, and essays have topped bestseller lists abroad since the 1990s and have been translated into twenty languages.
	Description: Belletristik : Bangladesh/Hindus ; Familie - Fundamentalismus - Islam.
	Description: When the Barbri Mosque at Ayodhya, India, was destroyed by Hindu fundamentalists on December 6,1992, fierce mob reprisals took place against the Hindu minority in Muslim Bangladesh. These incidents form the backdrop for Dr. Taslima Nasrin's explosive and courageous book, "Shame", describing the nightmarish fate of one family within her country's small Hindu community.

Please visit the following Web Links to know MORE!

[01] https://www.flipkart.com/books/taslima-nasrin~contributor/pr?sid=bks

[02] https://www.mehtapublishinghouse.com/book-details/Taslima-Nasreen-Combo-9-Books/1702.aspx

[03] https://www.thriftbooks.com/a/taslima-nasrin/313921/?srsltid=AfmBOopwcU-ado30BRFvRbP5bPQUcMDaxKpHpOldp4fOLJAR-SxP4nYi

[04] https://www.mbibooks.com/writer/taslima-nasrin/

[05] https://bdebooks.com/authors/taslima-nasrin/

[06] https://www.jainbookdepot.com/servlet/BookSearch?searchtype=Keywords&text1=Taslima%20Nasrin&page=

[07] https://kapot.in/product-tag/taslima-nasrin-books/

[08] https://www.addall.com/books-in-order/taslima-nasrin/

[09] https://www.mypustak.com/author/books-taslima-nasrin

(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)

Banned Books
of
Dr Taslima Nasrin

"Come what may, I will continue my fight for equality and justice without any compromise until my death. Come what may, I will never be silenced."

Several of Taslima's books have been banned, both in Bangladesh and in West Bengal.

The following books in the People's Republic of Bangladesh have been banned. Therefore, people in that people's republic are not allowed to read these books. It was banned in Bangladesh, even in India it has been partly censored. The book is available in this site, Now, wherever you are you can read the entirely uncensored version of the book.

1. Lajja (Shame), 1993

Lajja is banned by the Government of Bangladesh

2. Amar Meyebela (My girlhood), 1999

Banned by the Government of Bangladesh

- "Bangladesh bans new Taslima book," BBC News, 13 August 1999
- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared Amar Meyebela pornography
- "L'ffaire Taslima Nareen ou la parole à la Censeure," 1 October 1999

3.Utal Hawa (Gusty Wind), 2002
Utal Hawa is banned by the Government of Bangladesh

- Book Bans
- Bangladesh Bans Third Taslima Book, BBC News, August 27, 2002
- Book banned for attack on Islam
- Utal Hawa banned
- Taslima's new book also goes Lajja way
- Book Banned
- "Nasreen contre l'islam" 31 August 20

4. Ko (Speak up), 2003
Ko is banned by the High Court of Bangladesh.

- Suit against Taslima Nasreen
- Injunction on selling of Taslima's book
- Ko (ka) is banned
- Taslima's Ka erupts sexual controversy
- Split wide closed
- Book banned at behest of Islamic bigots
- Taslima's opinion

5. Dwikhandito, 2003
The book was banned by the 'Communist' Government of West Bengal of India on the charges of hurting religious feelings of the people. The book was also banned by the High Court of West Bengal.

- Ban on Taslima's Dwikhandita
- Ban On Dwikhandita Justified
- Dwikhandita banned
- Hypocrisy split wide open
- Protest book ban
- Ban on Taslima
- Bengal Bans Taslima's book
- Brickbats for Ban
- WB Govt Bans Taslima's Book
- Banning Taslima's Book
- Opinions

6. Sei Sob Ondhokar, 2004
The fourth part of the autobiography was banned on the 20th of February, one day before Language Day, a big

national day for Bengali language and literature.
No one protested the ban, according to several news sources:

- Another Taslima Book Banned Daily Star, 20 February 2004
- Book banned at behest of Islamic bigots

Taslima's other books are not so easy to find in the bookshops in Bangladesh. The once best-selling author's works are now taboo in her own country.

Taslima, who is against all censorship anywhere, has chosen an inspiring solution. On 16 December 2003 (appropriately the anniversary of Bangladesh's independence in 1971) she has put Dwikhandito in Bengali as well as Amar Meyebela. Amar Meyebela in Bengali on the worldwide web for everyone to read, whether they live in a country that does not respect freedom of expression or in a country that does.

Latest News : High Court lifted the ban on Dwikhandito in September 2005. The book would not be available on the net.
Taslima's Reaction after Dwikhandito ban (Bengali)
Indian Communist party defends the banning of the book
Communists statement for banning the book

Vajira, who is also a painter, poet and lyricist, has previously come into conflict with the Sinhala Buddhist hierarchy over his artistic work. The Peoples Alliance government has also banned one of his songs from state radio broadcasts. The song, which calls for freedom of artistic expression, is about Taslima Nasrin, the exiled Bangladeshi writer whose award-winning book has been banned in Bangladesh and in Sri Lanka. Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh have issued a fatwa or death sentence against Nasrin.

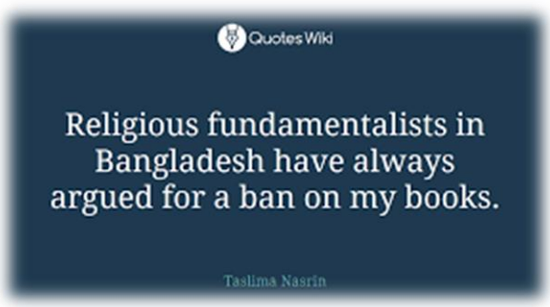
Sri-Lanka Story

Click on the following regarding the harm of censorship
Censorship Myths and Imagined Harms
Condemns Censorship

Facts:

- Taslima's columns have been constantly censored by the editors of the newspapers.
- Taslima's books are censored by the publishers.
- Taslima is a taboo in many countries.
- Taslima is blacklisted in media that controlled by the Governments and the conservatives.
- Taslima is blacklisted by the politicians who use religion to get votes from the Muslims.
- Taslima herself is banned in Bangladesh. She is prevented by the Government to enter her own country, because she expressed her views that are different from the views of the fanatics.
- (Most of the) Publishers are afraid to publish her books. Book sellers are afraid to sell her books. Supporters are afraid to support her publicly. Secularists are afraid to defend her when she is attacked by the religious fundamentalists.
- Her books have been pirated. Ninety percent publishers do not pay any royalty to the author.

(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)



A Controversial Feminist

Dr Taslima Nasrin

[Source: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Taslima-Nasrin]

Taslima Nasrin (born August 25, 1962, Mymensingh, East Pakistan [now Bangladesh]) is a Bangladeshi feminist author who was forced out of her country because of her controversial writings, which many Muslims felt discredited Islam. Her plight was often compared to that of Sir Salman Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

The daughter of a doctor, Nasrin also became a doctor, working in a family-planning clinic in Mymensingh until she was reassigned to a government clinic in Dhaka in 1990. She left the national medical service in 1993.

An author of magazine columns, poems, and fiction, Nasrin began publishing her writings in the 1970s. She wrote withering diatribes against the oppression of women and the Islamic code that she felt made them virtually the chattel of men. Her subject matter became increasingly sexual, and her condemnation of men was unrelenting. Contrary to Muslim practice, she wore her hair short and smoked cigarettes, and she eschewed traditional Muslim dress. Her writing and behaviour enraged and offended strict Muslims, and in 1992 groups of those who objected to her work attacked bookstores in Dhaka that had made her books available. In 1993 Nasrin became an international cause célèbre when a fatwa (formal legal opinion) was issued against her in reaction to her novel *Lajja* (1993; *Shame*), which depicts the persecution of a Hindu family by Muslims.

She further angered conservatives in May 1994, when she was quoted in the Calcutta *Statesman* as saying that the Qurʾān "should be revised thoroughly." This brought larger and more vociferous demonstrations, including the demand that Nasrin be put to death. A bounty was offered to anyone who would kill her. She insisted that her statement referred to the Sharīʿah, the Islamic code of law, rather than the Qurʾān itself. The outcry against her went unabated, however, and the government called for her arrest, invoking a 19th-century blasphemy law. After about two months in hiding, Nasrin appeared in court. She was released on bail and allowed to keep her passport. A few days later she left the country to find sanctuary in Sweden. There she remained in hiding while stating that, when it was safe, she would return to Bangladesh to continue her battle for women's rights.

Nasrin remained in exile after 1994. From Europe she moved to India in 2004, but her presence was sharply criticized by Islamists there. In 2007 the city of Kolkata (as Calcutta was known after 2001) erupted into riots as Islamists demanded that she be forced to leave the country. Nasrin then fled to the United States. Throughout these upheavals, she continued to publish, producing an autobiography in several volumes—*Amar meyebela* (1999; *My Girlhood*, also published as *My Bengali Girlhood*), *Utal hava* (2002; *Wild Wind*), and *Dwikhandito* (2003; "Divided")—as well as novels and poetry.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Note:

The following THREE articles,

a] *Taslima Nasrin's Works in the light of the Philosophy of Atheism*
[by Dr Alpesh Upadhyay, Associate Professor-English, Saraspur Arts and Commerce College, Ahmedabad, India] **&**

b] The Taslima Nasrin Controversy and Feminism in Bangladesh: *A Geo-Political and Transnational Perspective*
[by Habiba Zaman]

c] *A Feminist Study on Taslima Nasrin's French Lover*
[by Soyimla Akum**,** PhD Scholar (English), Nagaland University, India,
Email: qsoyimla@gmail.com]

provide a comprehensive and realistic picture of Dr Taslima Nasrin - Writer, Secular Humanist, Physician, Feminist and an Activist.
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

TASLIMA NASRIN'S WORKS IN THE LIGHT OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF ATHEISM

Dr. Alpesh Upadhyay
Associate Professor-English
Saraspur Arts and Commerce College
Ahmedabad,India

Abstract :

As a writer, Taslima Nasrin has a unique style. The fact that she is both creative and female has given her unique insight into religious, caste, family, and traditional societal issues as they pertain to women. She isn't content with the way things are when a woman isn't acknowledged or understood correctly in her environment. There is a repression of her inner sentiments, assertions, and emotions. People who live in patriarchal societies face a lot of pressure to sacrifice and change their beliefs and moralities to fit the needs of others.

Religion, language, caste, and class have all played a role in defining the characters in different ways throughout the writer's works. No matter how things change, what hasn't remained a patriarchal society's treatment of women as something to be despised. Emotional space is completely denied. All human communication is forbidden to them, and as a result, they are utterly alone. According to Dr. Nasrin's writings, a woman is forced to suffer in many anti-humanistic scenarios. She is unable to utter a single word. Their feminine sensitivities are raging in certain locations to the fullest extent. Nasrin's French Lover, for instance, is a narrative about a woman's quest for tenacity and self-reliance. I get the impression from her actions that Nasrin is embarking on an adventurous journey... She's determined to keep going and move on.

Index Terms: religion, morality

As the name implies, Taslima Nasrin is a Bangladeshi author. She expresses herself through her writing in Bengali. English, Hindi, and other European languages have all been used in the translation of her writings. After the publication of Lajja, she became well-known. She has a reputation as a contentious author. When it comes to religious beliefs and sexuality, she's an outspoken atheist who writes about it all the time. These are the kinds of concerns that don't get discussed openly in Bangladeshi society. Muslims want her put to death, but Hindu fanatics want to make her their new friend. However, she is an atheist, and as a creative writer, she has nothing to do with any religion, whether it Hindu, Muslim, or any other. She refers to herself as a humanist while speaking about her beliefs. She considers humanism to be superior to all other faiths because it embraces the humanity of all people.

As a writer, Taslima Nasrin has a unique style. The fact that she is both creative and female has given her unique insight into religious, caste, family, and traditional societal issues as they pertain to women. She isn't content with the way things are when a woman isn't acknowledged or understood correctly in her environment. There is a repression of her inner sentiments, assertions, and emotions. People who live in patriarchal societies face a lot of pressure to sacrifice and change their beliefs and moralities to fit the needs of others.

Taslima Nasrin began submitting and publishing poems in literary journals in 1975. She began editing and producing a poetry journal in 1978. She's been at it ever since. Her debut collection of poetry was released in 1986. Her second collection of poetry, published in 1989, was a critical and commercial success. Her third collection of poems was released in 1990. As a result of her poetry, which denounced Islamic women's oppression, Islamic extremists began a campaign against her, destroying the newspaper offices and filing lawsuits against her. Most of her poetry depict women's repressive awareness. Islamic fundamentalists were enraged by her scathing criticism, and they staged anti-her protests and processions across the country. Her humanism was put to the test right now. Despite the threats and brutality she had to endure, she stood firm in her humanistic beliefs.

While Taslima Nasrin's poetry does not compare to Salman Rushdie's in terms of technical ability or literary acuity, it is more likely to be read and understood by those who need to hear it. Nasrin's writing is clear and unmistakable; there is no literary challenge to solve. Her argument is well-reasoned, and she backs it up with biting humour and stark, elemental images. They strike to the core of what she sees all around her: injustice, war, violence, and abuse. A crime against an individual is a crime against society, regardless of whether it is sanctioned by the government or religious custom, she says. Only a handful of other "*feminist*" poets can communicate to us in such a straightforward, beautiful, and intelligible way as her poetry does.

Her poetry is an insightful critique of the life of a woman in an orthodox and religious society where she lacks the freedom to express what she wants to say about her own body and sexuality. Her poems are perfectly understandable and persuasive.

The content of Taslima Nasrin's writing is what makes her famous, not the style. Her works demonstrate both the positive and negative aspects of her writing style. They are criticisms of her cultural and religious background's patriarchal tyranny. All they do is criticise everything equally.

Taslima Nasrin rose to prominence as a writer as a result of her divisive novel "*Lajja*." As an atheist, she's proven she has the guts to stand by her beliefs.

In the narrative, Nasrin creates three different love triangles. Suranjan-Parveen, Suranjan-Ratna, and Maya-Jahangir are the other couples involved. Suranjan and Parveen have a deep and passionate affection for one another. They wouldn't be able to function without the other. They both desired a long-term relationship and eventually a marriage. However, they were unable to wed. Suranjan had refused to accept Islam as Parveen had requested. Is it right for a sincere lover or cherished to put such a restriction on another? Suranjan is unable to accept Muslims because he has no religious beliefs of his own. He doesn't believe in anything. Is religion more important than love? Is religion more important than love? The Hindu suitor was also rejected by Parveen's parents. As a result, in Bangladesh, sectarianism restricts the free flow of human passion at its most primal level.

Taslima Nasrin's second Bengali novel, *French Lover*, was published in 2001. *French Lover* tells the narrative of Nilanjana, a young woman who travels to a foreign city in pursuit of love and freedom.

In a Bangladeshi context, the novel is a significant milestone for Nasrin's unique style of challenging and intervening against male dominance, which consequently and equally has a global appeal. It's clear from all of her work that she's obsessed with Bangladeshi patriarchy and social systems' constructions of the female body and women's desires. Female sexuality is a hot topic in the book, but not just for Bangladeshi women; it's also taboo in Indian culture. When it comes to property, marriage, and divorce laws, women are particularly vulnerable to marginalisation.

The English translation of Chaar Kanya by Taslima Nasrin is still pending. The plot revolves around Yamuna, Sheela, Zumur, and Hira, four teenage girls. They have a lot of issues to deal with in their daily lives. According to this, their social and cultural environment does not grasp that every woman and girl has the right, on an equal footing with males, to realise all of their human rights - civil, political, economic social and cultural. Certain human rights are denied to the four female characters in the narrative because of their gender.

In other words, Yamuna believes in equality for all people. To her, humanist principles should be nurtured rather than imposed on one's character. She's a big fan of living. She aspires to live a happy life. There's no doubt in her mind that no matter what happens, she will not run away but instead tackle any challenge head on. One of the humanist ideals is to put others before oneself. She's come to the conclusion that mankind is the most important thing in the world. It takes precedence above all else.

The first edition of Homecoming *(Phera)* appeared in English. Her latest book, like many of her previous ones, is about humanism and human rights. Human rights are inextricably linked to the humanistic philosophy. A humanist is a person who takes an active role in society. As a result of Taslima Nasrin's novel, a scenario of human rights breaches has emerged as the most pressing issue of our day, affecting not just Bangladesh but the entire world. The tale concludes on a downbeat note, giving the impression of a bleak future.

To demonstrate the moral validity and ethical humanity subsequently, Taslima, as a humanist, addresses modern obstacles to human rights here. Human rights and human dignity are respected.

Nasrin's characters frequently take a strong stance against religious values. They have no interest in religious practises or rituals. They are atheists. The wellbeing of mankind is more important to them, and that can only be achieved via education, a scientific mindset, and reasonable behaviour.

Taslima Nasrin is the author of a number of collections of short stories and essays, both fictional and non-fictional. Nirbacchita Kalam has received a great deal of praise for her work. Also, a book containing her correspondence and interviews, named Priya Taslima Nasrin, has been made available to the public for purchase. All of this illustrates Nasrin's way of thinking about the world and his place in it. Atheism as a science, as applied in today's world, may be shown in this illustration by Nasrin.

Taslima's rage is well-founded in light of the countless instances of injustice and human inhumanity toward man that serve as the foundation for the system's overall inhumanity. Islam's treatment of women, Vedic times and women, contemporary Bangladeshi political leaders and their intrigues and the Liberation War of 71's women victims are just some of the topics that Taslima Nasrin addresses in her enlightening book.

TASLIMA NASRIN is an advocate for reason and morality in all religious beliefs that oppress people and incite injustice and hatred. She takes a humanistic stance.

As a humanist who rejects religious belief, Nasrin is an agnostic. In her essay Atheism, she emphasises the importance of having an atheist point of view. She holds the view that God will not be able to intervene to alter the social order. There are no miracles that can happen in a split second and alter the course of history. The only thing that can stop evil from triumphing is if good people stay silent. Atheism and humanism both start with this premise. For atheists, doing good comes from the goodness of their hearts, while for theists, it comes from their fear of God or some other occult power. Reason and the recognition of the importance of timeless human values are at the heart of Atheism's greatness.

There are approximately 110 million atheists in the world. Atheism asserts that people have free will. Religions and religiosity must be replaced by a spirit of humanism. In this world, there is only one true religion: humanism. The highest virtue is that of humanity. Taslima argues for humanism in pieces such as "No Religion is Greater Than Humanity," "Humanity Burned to Ashes," and "Marks of Religion are Flying."

For more information on her work, see Amar Meyebela (1999), Utal Hawa (2002), and Dwikhondito (2003), among other memoirs. On the surface, she's a fierce feminism. The Muslim clergy in her nation are upset because she questions the Koran and discusses sexuality in her work. She has penned a courageous and brutally honest book about her upbringing and adolescence.

It's a well-written account of a conservative childhood in the midst of upheaval. This is when she transforms into a woman of debate and soul, working to heal social as well as physical problems, no matter where they stem from.

The analytical and inquisitive nature of Taslima's mind shines through throughout her narrative. To describe the world of disgusting superstitions and naive faith, we must turn to Taslima. Mullahs exploit terrified and uninformed women in the name of religion. Taslima's memoirs also impresses with her compassion for Bangladeshi society's marginalised groups. Taslima believes in the dignity of all people. She rejects Islam as a religion. She, on the other hand, has faith in mankind. She doesn't believe in any religion for very good reasons. She doesn't see the point of religious rites and ceremonies. She's not a big fan of Id. All four of her autobiographies have sparked a great deal of debate. There has never been a writer in modern Bengali literature who has elicited such passionate responses before him..

Taslima Nasrin is of the opinion that the humanism movement needs more reasonable individuals to join it and remove the grip it has on society. When it comes to mechanical religious rites or strict social norms, even educated individuals in the era of science and technology don't use their commonsense. All of this causes women to feel smothered. Taslima Nasrin, a devout humanist, describes the humanist traditions as a loose network of people who are generally concerned with questions of the spirit and who want to maximise the sum of human happiness on this planet; people who are naturally respectful of others, who are wedded to rationalism and scientific rigour, who revere all life and who are unafraid to proclaim and celebrate the joy of existence and the richness in human expression.

Taslima Nasrin is a humanist who stands by her principles. Her writings are a type of conceptual warfare against religious zealots and other people who adhere to rigid social conventions. This book sheds a lot of insight on their violent impulses, beliefs, and rituals toward other people, all of which she exposes as disturbing. Humanism vs religious extremism is a recurring theme in all of Nasrin's writing, whether it's novels, poetry, or essays. All that varies are the settings and people' names, but the story's central theme remains constant.

More essential than everything else, one must love one's fellow human beings. Even if everything else fails, Taslima Nasrin is dedicated to spreading this message through her work.

REFERENCES

Martin, Michael**.** *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*. Cambridge University Press. 2006.

Nagel, Ernest, *Philosophical Concepts of Atheism. Basic Beliefs: The Religious Philosophies of Mankind.* Reprinted in *Critiques of God*, edited by Peter A. Angeles, Prometheus Books, 1997.

Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*, Mariner Book Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 2006

Nasrin, Taslima, *All about Women*, Rupa & Company, New Delhi, 2005.

'_____' *Dwikhandit*, Trans. Susil Gupta, Vani Prakashan, New Delhi, 2004.

'_____' *French Lover*, Trans. Sreejata Guha, Penguine Books Ltd., New Delhi, 2002.

'_____' *Homecoming*, Trans. Rani Ray, Srishti Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2005.

'_____' *Love Poems of Taslima Nasrin*, Trans. Ashim Chowdhaury, Rupa and Company, New Delhi, 2005.

'_____' *Lajja,* Trans. Tutul Gupta, Penguine Books India Ltd., New Delhi, 1994.

'_____' *My Girlhood*, Trans. Gopa Majumdar, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2001.

'_____' *Selected Columns*, Trans. Debjani Sengupta, Srishti Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2004.

'_____' *The Game in Reverse: Poems,* Trans. Carolyne Wright, George Braziller, New York, 1995.

'_____' *Wild Wind, My Stormy Youth: An Autobiography*, Trans. Nandini Guha, Srishti Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2006.

Shelly, P.B. *The Necessity of Atheism,* Indian Atheist Publishers, New Delhi, The 1986.

Smith, Warren, *Celebrities in Hell*, New York: Barricade Books, 2002.

Singh, Gian. *Dr. Ambedkar and Humanism,* Bheem Patrika Publications, Jalandhar, 1989.

Singh, Bhagat. *Why I am an Atheist*, Indian Atheist Publishers, New Delhi, 1989.

The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol.4 New York: The Macmillan, 1967.

The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, Second Edition. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

The Taslima Nasrin Controversy And Feminism In Bangladesh: A Geo-Political And Transnational Perspective[1]

Habiba Zaman

ABSTRACT

Taslima Nasrin, a Bangladeshi writer, attracted international attention in 1994 when an obscure religious fundamentalist group issued a *fatwa* sentencing her to death and demanding her trial on charges of blasphemy. This paper discusses the Nasrin controversy in the context of post-colonial religious fundamentalism, communalism, and feminist issues in South Asia.

RÉSUMÉ

Talima Nasrin, une écrivaine bangladaise, a attiré l'attention du monde entier en 1994 lorsqu'un groupe fondamentaliste d'une religion obscure avait lancé un *fatwa* la condamnant à mort et demandant son procès pour blasphème. Cet article discute de la controverse Nasrin dans le contexte religieux fondamentaliste post-colonial, l'esprit communautaire, et les questions féministes dans l'Asie du Sud.

In 1994, at the height of the Taslima Nasrin controversy, the *New Yorker* and the *London Review of Books* published two fairly long pieces on her saga (Weaver 1994; Wright 1994). Knowing that as a Bangladeshi woman I would be interested, a mentor and friend of mine sent the clippings to me with a note that read:

> Now I wait to read what a Bangladesh woman will have to say about Nasreen (she sounds pretty headlong, headstrong to me and not quite mature!). One would think she'd learn something of wisdom rather than anger from three marriages!! Eh?[2]

Until 1993, Nasrin[3] was largely unknown outside Bangladesh and West Bengal in India. Nasrin attracted international attention in May 1994 when an obscure fundamentalist group issued a *fatwa* (religious sanction)[4] sentencing Nasrin to death, put a bounty of *taka* 50,000 (US$1,250) on her head and demanded her trial on charges of blasphemy. The Western media immediately labelled her a Bangladeshi "female Salman Rushdie" (MacWilliam 1994). The international media presented Bangladesh as an Iranian-style theocracy where women are oppressed because of Islam and described Nasrin, who spoke out, as a victim of a fundamentalist attack (Wright 1994). Nasrin was quoted as saying: "I will not be silenced. Everywhere I look I see women being mistreated and their oppression justified in the name of religion. Is it not my moral responsibility to protest?" (*Outlook* 1994, 25).

The wide publicity about Nasrin across nations within a short span of time deserves closer attention and analysis. To me, there are serious problems with the setting up or targeting, by the Western press, of Nasrin as a symbol of freedom of expression and of women's rights. The way the Western press has presented her and the whole issue is inherently misleading for a variety of reasons: (i) it presents Bangladesh as a uni-dimensional theocracy; (ii) it ignores a complex history of colonial and post-colonial legacies and the divisive politics of the sub-continent; (iii) it overlooks the long and rich history of women's rights and human rights activists and the skepticism with which feminists view her "cause" in Bangladesh.

I argue in this paper that a combination of

colonial and post-colonial legacies and divisive politics in the sub-continent (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) presented Nasrin to the West as an ardent advocate of women's rights, a lone fighter against religious fundamentalism - particularly Islamic fundamentalism. First, I explore post-colonial, transnational, feminist discourses in the context of religious fundamentalism, communalism,[5] and feminist issues in South Asia, particularly Bangladesh and India. Second, I introduce Nasrin's case through her writings, then describe the publication of her novel, *Lajja*,[6] and look at subsequent events along religious, socio-political, and transnational lines. Third, I explore the role of the international media in creating Nasrin as a champion of anti-Islam and presenting her as the sole feminist in Bangladesh. Fourth, I outline the complexities of communal, as well as state, politics in the sub-continent, the geo-political history of Bangladesh, and the activities of post-colonial and transnational social forces. Finally, I look at the actions of women's groups around the Nasrin issue.

FEMINIST THEORIZING: POST-COLONIAL AND TRANSNATIONAL ISSUES

During the British colonial rule and the national independence movements in the sub-continent, religion was used as a powerful weapon by both Hindu and Muslim leadership against each other and against the British. The independence movement created a vision for social justice and democracy, promising to provide full rights to religious minorities and women. However, the post-colonial nation-states of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan quickly consolidated their geographical and political power, leading ultimately to the birth of religious revivalism. Since 1990, there has been an alarming spread of religious fundamentalism across nations in South Asia. The demolition of the Babri mosque in India in 1992[7] and the ensuing massacre of Muslim minorities in several states of India, as well as atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh and Pakistan, reflect the continuing politics of communalism in post-colonial states (Hossain 1995; Sarkar and Butalia 1995; Jayawardena and De Alwis 1996).

I agree with Jayawardena and De Alwis (1996), who state that while national liberation struggles were often positive for women, post-colonial nationalism in South Asia "took on a chauvinist hue, tinged with misogyny" (xii). As a result, violence and atrocities against women - for example, *sati* and dowry deaths in India, acid burning, rape, trafficking in women in Bangladesh - are still on the rise (Ashworth 1995; Zaman 1998). How is religious fundamentalism juxtaposed with the rise in violence against women in contemporary South Asian societies? Sangari and Vaid argue:

> ... far from enjoying the benefits of so-called development, the majority of women have in fact been pushed to the margins of the production process. Alongside this "invisible" economic process, there is a visible escalation of communal conflicts and an increasing politicization of "religious" identities. These later developments have given a new lease of life to patriarchal practices under "religious" sanction. (1989, 2)

In their recent work on feminist genealogies, Alexander and Mohanty (1997) favour taking a "local feminist praxis," but suggest that "we also need to understand the relation to larger, cross-national processes" (xix). Looking at the communal revivalism and the violence against women in Bangladesh and India, one can find transnational processes involving politics and religion influencing every level of social existence. The case of Taslima Nasrin can perhaps be better understood in this transnational context, and I develop this later in the paper. An analysis of transnational geo-politics is convenient for a number of purposes - it acknowledges "a purely locational politics of global-local;" it cross-cuts national boundaries; and persuasively challenges the construction of "inadequate and inaccurate binary and divisions" (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 13). As Grewal and Kaplan convincingly argue:

> Transnational linkages influence every level of social existence. Thus the effects of configurations of practices at those levels are varied and historically specific. (1994, 13)

NASRIN AS A WRITER, POET AND COLUMNIST

Taslima Nasrin, a Bangladeshi physician, has been writing on women's issues since the 1980s. Between 1989 and 1994, she authored nineteen books and wrote columns for various local daily and weekly newspapers. Of the books, seven were novels, one was a collection of short stories, seven were collections of poems, and four were volumes of articles previously published as newspaper columns. Her straightforward and provocative style made her well known and controversial in Bangladesh. For example, her book, *Nirbachita Kolam (Selected Writings)*, was on the best-seller list in Bangladesh and more than 100,000 copies were sold in 1992.

Typically, Nasrin's writings attack the status quo, religion, and men as agents of oppression. A recurrent theme in her writing is sexual discrimination and violence prevalent against women in Bangladesh. She uses graphic language to express herself and to depict the situation of women in the country. In 1993, J. P. Das translated some examples from *Nirbachita Kolam*. Here is one example:

> A lucky man's wife dies, an unlucky man's cattle dies. ... If your wife dies, you can get another wife. But if you lose your cattle, you do not get free cattle. For new cattle you have to pay hard cash, whereas a new wife brings some cash. In such a situation, you can neglect your wife, but you should never neglect your cattle. (Das 1993, 28)

Her analogy between the status of a wife and the status of an animal is symbolic, and it narrates explicitly the discrimination against women and their subordination in the family structure as well as in the society.

Most of Nasrin's writings are grounded in her own and others' experience within the context of wider social life, and she juxtaposes personal and larger social issues. For instance, by recollecting and rearticulating her own/other people's memories, Nasrin exposes the brutality of the Pakistani army which violated women's minds and bodies during the Liberation War. These crimes were never brought to the International War Crime Tribunal System for various geo-political reasons. In the following extract translated by writer Shamsul Islam, Nasrin does not write down her own war story, but reconstructs someone else's to show the pervasiveness of violence against women - and the consequences:

> Of my three maternal uncles involved in the freedom struggle only two returned from the camp after sixteen days of captivity. Of our neighbours who were part of the struggle, some lost their arms while others lost their legs. Still, all relatives and near ones were thrilled to have these people back. However, nobody wanted my aunt to return, as if they would be happier in her absence ... for sixteen continuous days my aunt was locked up in a dark cell and repeatedly raped by ten lustful pro-Pakistani male animals. Our society is not proud of such aunts. ... Each one of us has accepted the damages of war, the gruesome torture inflicted by boots and rifle butts, even the horrors of death. But we have not accepted the accidents [sic] called rape ... my aunt, to protect herself from further shame and disrespect, hanged herself from the ceiling fan. (Islam 1994, 20)

In reconstructing her aunt's story, Nasrin brings to the surface the consequence of being a woman in Bangladesh and the polarization of shame and honour along gender lines. In the introduction to their book about embodied violence in South Asia, Jayawardena and De Alwis echo Nasrin's views:

> Women are seen to be the repository of tradition and their "inviolability" has been a powerful tool of cultural defence against modernisations and westernisation. Nonetheless the control of women's bodies as the symbolic space of the nation has often involved women's oppression. (1996, xv)

Like the above two stories, many of Nasrin's stories transcend national boundaries and present feminist as well as transnational issues. She clearly makes links between women's oppression and exploitation, violence against women and socially sanctioned silence.

Nasrin's concerns encompass multiple layers of women's oppression. Her fight is for freeing women's minds and bodies from men's control. In another extract from *Nirbachito Kolam*, she states :

> Look, they come to bite you, taste you, tear you; they are another name for death. They are another name for savagery and they come to drink you up, lick you up, smash you up. They are men. They are not human .... (Das 1993, 28)

In a poem translated by Alam, "Women Can't," Nasrin repeats the message:

> Any man can unhesitatingly become exultant
> By touching and kneading
> Any woman's flesh and fat,
> Any man can get heated
> By suddenly opening up any woman from top to bottom...
> Only animals and men can
> Touch a body of flesh
> Without love.
> Women can't. (1994, 367)

Nasrin's personal experiences - for example, as a nine-year-old seeing soldiers raping women, including some of her friends - are reflected in the gross generalizations she makes about men. Anger laces Nasrin's writings, and her anger is mostly directed against men. The anger and bitterness is evident in "Enjoying a Woman:"

> What all you'll get
> in this beautiful body,
> you will also get in a full-time wife,
> in half a dozen office girls
> and in cheap harlots ... .
> And since I know that
> before you can spit on my body
> I spit twice over into your aberrant mind.
> (Das 1994, 19)

From her writings, one may assume that she hates men. As Weaver comments about Nasrin, however, "She frequently professes to hate men, yet she has always surrounded herself with them" (1994, 48). Claiming that she is an advocate for both sexes, Nasrin rejects outright her public image as a hard-hitting feminist and man-hater: "I am just an advocate of humanity, and of equal rights for both men and women" (Amin 1993). Nasrin as a writer breaks down stereotyped gender relations as well as sex roles, and challenges male chauvinism in unconventional ways. For example, in her poem, "Other Way Round," she uses reversed role-playing to ridicule society's norms:

> I notice a man buying a woman at Ramna Park
> I would like to buy a man!
> Clean shaved, clean shirt, groomed hair
> sitting on a park bench,
> Or standing lazily at a street corner,
> I would bargain him for five or ten Taka a time.
>
> I would then pull him up by the collar on my rickshaw,
> Tickle him to giggle,
> Bring him to my room,
> Take my high-heeled shoe
> To beat him up at my pleasure,
> And tell him, 'Piss off!'...
> I would like to buy a man.
> (Alam 1993, 30)

Reversed role-playing ridicules society's norms, breaks down stereotyped gender relations as well as sex roles, and challenges male chauvinism in an unconventional way.

One frequent topic in Nasrin's writings is women's bodies - a taboo subject in Bangladesh society where there is silence about women's bodies and related issues. Contemporary women's groups in Bangladesh have demanded control over women's bodies only in the area of reproductive rights and have fought against capitalist/imperialist aggressions to control women's bodies through population control measures (Akhter 1992). Issues like marital rape, incest, homosexuality, and female orgasm are taboo subjects and are considered firmly beyond social issues. Nasrin's vivid descriptions of women's physical anatomy and her narrations on the issue of incest challenge the norms of Bangladesh. Riaz considers Nasrin's explicit description of woman's physical anatomy as a form of breaking the structured silence (1995). It is the last topic most Bangladeshi women would share in the public arena. As reported by Weaver, Nasrin argues:

> Why shouldn't I write about what I've seen? I'm a doctor ... . To see the ruptured vaginas of women who've been raped? The six- and seven-year-olds who have been violated by their fathers, brothers, and uncles - by their own families. (1994, 14)

Beyond doubt, Nasrin is a strong proponent of freeing women's bodies from male aggression. Her central argument as I have translated it is: "Any really healthy, brilliant woman will be seen as bad" (Nasrin 1993, preface). According to Chowdhury and Chowdhury, Nasrin's work comes close to that of some Western feminists like Erica Jong (*Fear of Flying*) and Naomi Wolfe (*The Beauty Myth*), both of whom have been attacked in the West as pornographers (1994, 8). In Bangladesh, certainly many label Nasrin's work as pornography. Others, however, focus on the issues she raises. For example, Siddiqui (1997) describes Nasrin as "a relentless campaigner of the cause" and compares her with the rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, who turned his anger against the British colonial forces through poems and writings and consequently was imprisoned. Similarly, Nasrin, for her writings, has been exiled.

PUBLICATION OF *LAJJA* AND SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

Lajja is perhaps not her best work, but Nasrin gained international recognition after she published the novel in February 1993. Although *Lajja* was a short and hurriedly written novel, it became a best-seller in both Bangladesh and India. Through *Lajja*, Nasrin also quickly became entangled with volatile communal politics in Bangladesh and India.

Lajja depicts the plight of a fictional Hindu family in Dhaka, in the wake of communal violence that erupted in the city after the destruction of the Babri mosque by Hindu fundamentalists in December 1992. It is the story of a young, progressive Hindu man (Suranjan) in Bangladesh. His sister has been kidnapped by Muslim fanatics during the communal riots that spilled over from the Babri mosque, and Suranjan takes his revenge on a Muslim prostitute. Later on, the family decides to leave Bangladesh for India. The book received mixed reactions. Liberal intellectuals in Bangladesh considered *Lajja* a second-class literary work. Other people said that it publicized the situation of Hindus - a religious minority in Bangladesh. Still others considered it as provocative - distorting and defaming the pervasive secular forces in contemporary Bangladesh. Hindu fundamentalist parties in India (especially the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]) used the book to further their political cause and distributed free copies of an unauthorized translation all over India. As Shamsul Islam remarks:

> The official organ of Hindu communal politics, a weekly magazine, printed *Lajja* shamelessly and deleted those parts of the novel which held the Hindu communal parties of India responsible for provoking the Muslim fundamentalists of

Bangladesh. (1994, 20)

In addition, the "Indo-phobic" quarter in Bangladesh propagated the rumour that Nasrin had received a huge amount of money from BJP to write the book and destabilize communal harmony in Bangladesh (Riaz 1995).

Nasrin's writings about religion, sexual freedom, and religious *pirs* (teachers) in Islam and her treatment of explicit sex had already angered Bangladeshi *mullahs* (religious clerics). After the publication of *Lajja* and its reception in India, Nasrin began to receive anonymous letters, death threats, and phone calls. In February 1992, at the Bookfair in Dhaka, angry mobs attacked bookstores that carried her books. The deliberate campaign against Nasrin added more fuel to the mullahs' anger and, in the fall of 1993, a previously unknown fundamentalist group named Shahaba Sainik Parishad in Bangladesh issued a fatwa and put a bounty on Nasrin's head. The group demanded both that a ban be placed on all her books and that she be put on trial for blasphemy. As a result, *Lajja* was banned by the government of Bangladesh on the grounds that it might prove the Indo-phobic rumours true and destabilize communal harmony in the country.

Events took a dramatic turn in early May 1994. After attending a human rights conference in Paris, on her way back to Bangladesh, Nasrin visited Calcutta and was interviewed by Sujata Sen, a reporter for the *Statesman*, a local English daily. In the published report, Sen quoted Nasrin as saying that "the Quran was written by a human being" and it "should be revised thoroughly" (Riaz 1995; Wright 1994). Nasrin later refuted the statement and stated, "the misquotation was due to the inexperience of the non-Muslim female reporter of the *Statesman*" (Wright 1994, 20). Nasrin added that she promoted change to the Sharia, the texts of Islamic law, but not to the Koran. She issued the following clarification as reported in a journal:

> I hold the Koran, the Vedas, and the Bible and all such religious texts determining the lives of their followers as out of place and out of time. We have crossed the social-historical contexts in which these were written and therefore, we should not be guided by their precepts; the question of revising thoroughly or otherwise is irrelevant. We have to move beyond these ancient texts if we want to progress. (*Women and Revolution* 1994-1995, 14)

After the interview, the fundamentalists in Bangladesh launched a campaign against Nasrin, particularly the mullahs, who formed a Taslima Nasrin Peshan Committee (Committee to Grind Down Taslima Nasrin). To save herself from death threats and to avoid arrest, Nasrin went into hiding. On July 29, 1994, nearly 200,000 Islamic fundamentalists marched through the streets of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, demanding Nasrin's death (*Women and Revolution* 1994-1995, 14). The fundamentalists repeatedly protested in the streets of Dhaka and other major cities, demanding Nasrin's trial on charges of blasphemy. On the basis of an age-old law drawn up by the British colonial government, the Bangladesh government finally laid charges against Nasrin and a no-bail warrant was issued for her arrest. Under this law, anyone offending religious sentiments may be punished by up to two years in prison. Meanwhile, negotiations were going on between Nasrin's legal advisors (such as Dr. Kamal Hossain, a renowned lawyer in the country), Western ambassadors (Sweden, Norway, United States, France and Germany), the Women Writers' Committee of PEN (International Writers Group) and representatives of the Bangladesh government. Finally, Bangladesh, an aid-dependent country, had no choice but to comply with the demands of the donor countries. Nasrin was granted bail and allowed to leave on August 9, 1994, for Stockholm, Sweden.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

The Western media presented its coverage of the proposed trial of Taslima Nasrin and her fleeing from Bangladesh to Sweden in a melodramatic way - Bangladesh was an Islamic theocracy, and Nasrin was anti-Islam and the sole feminist speaking out against religious

fundamentalism, women's oppression, and patriarchal structures of the society. To capture the flavour of Western media publicity, one only has to look at newspapers and magazines between 1993 and 1995, the time when international controversy about Nasrin was at its height. The front page of a journal was titled, "Islamic Fundamentalists Vow to Kill Woman Writer" (*Women and Revolution* 1994-1995, 14). The *Observer* (London, England) in its World News column reported, "Bangladeshi [sic] call to hang 'female Salman Rushdie'" (MacWilliam, July 3, 1994, 21). The *Globe and Mail* in Toronto claimed, "Fundamentalists continue to call for Nasrin's death," and "Exiled author longs for home: Writer who fled Bangladesh to escape Islamic extremists has become an international symbol" (August 31, 1994; Leeman, February 18, 1995). The *Vancouver Sun* announced, "Police hunt for Muslim novelist over 'insult'" (June 6, 1994). *Outlook* reported, "Sentenced to Death" (March, 1995). *Maclean's* magazine published a feature titled, "Fighting words: A poet forced into hiding by Muslim extremists still speaks out for oppressed women" (Morris 1995, 44). As Carolyne Wright pointed out:

> Compelling photos in the *New York Times* have shown Bangladeshi women clad in burqah and veil, as if Bangladesh were an Iranian-style Islamic theocracy - when in reality very few women dress so severely. (1994, 21)

As these headlines show, the Western media were anxious to portray themselves as secular and democratic. There was no rigorous analysis of the Nasrin affair in the context of transnational politics, inter-communal violence, colonial legacies or the role of the state in consolidating power in the sub-continent. The Western media's treatment of Nasrin ignored the strengths of existing feminist groups and of the secular forces which had a long historical tradition in Bangladesh. Ajit Bhattacharjea, a political analyst, commented:

> The Hindu minority of some 25 million was able to stay on despite communal reactions to events in India. The tradition of tolerance, with its strong Sufi and pre-Islamic roots survived, especially among the intellectuals. Pride in the Bengali language and culture grew, to the extent that anniversaries related to Rabindranath Tagore were celebrated with more enthusiasm than in West Bengal. Women play a role in society and politics that orthodox mullahs would not approve. (1994, 8)

Ironically, Nasrin's work prior to *Lajja* was limited to women's rights and discrimination against women in a local context. Both the publication of *Lajja* with its wide publicity in India as a champion of anti-communalism in Bangladesh and the complexities of geo-politics in the Indian sub-continent placed Nasrin in the international arena. Nasrin's own actions and attitudes towards the mullahs also helped the situation deteriorate. As Carolyne Wright remarked:

> Taslima Nasreen appeared to enjoy taking even more confrontational stances. At times, she even appeared to taunt her enemies, smoking a cigarette while handling the Koran in a BBC television feature filmed before she went into hiding. (1994, 21)

The Western media's portrayal of Nasrin as a champion of anti-Islam not only helped the political situation to deteriorate further, but also took away her support at the grass-roots level. It is a fact that the majority of Bangladeshis are Muslims, but not fundamentalist in the traditional sense. Indeed, there is a strong secular trend in Bangladesh politics and culture. For instance, the leftist/liberal forces, many students, and various women's groups fought side by side relentlessly from 1952 to 1971 to free Bangladesh from the military-bureaucratic neo-colonial complex of Pakistan. Partha Ghosh, Director at the Indian Council of Social Science Research, remarked, "Bangladesh is typical of South Asian politics

where religion is used for political purposes yet secularist forces also remain vigilant and strong" (1993, 709). Throughout the Nasrin controversy, the Western media did not explore the activities of either leftist/liberal forces or feminist/women's groups, and in its ignorance, overlooked these other contemporary forces. They painted a negative image of Bangladesh, where religious fundamentalists issue and execute fatwas and Bangladeshi women are passive victims, helpless in their daily lives. In fact, liberal and secular forces were strong in the socio-political processes in Bangladesh. The 1996 general election demonstrated again how strong these forces were when all religious parties were rejected outright by the voters in favour of secular democratic parties. The Western media image of Bangladesh as a uni-dimensional Islamic theocracy was totally misleading and false.

TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS IN THE SUB-CONTINENT AND THE ROLE OF THE POST-COLONIAL STATES IN THE NASRIN AFFAIR

To comprehend the Nasrin affair in the context of religion, politics and feminist issues in the sub-continent, one needs to go beyond her case and look at both the local context and the post-colonial socio-political processes crosscutting national boundaries. Since the liberation of Bangladesh, a number of writers have received fatwas as well as death threats from the Islamic fundamentalist parties. Notable among these are Ahmed Sharif, Kabir Chowdhury, Begum Sufia Kamal, and Jahanara Begum, all of whom ignored the death threats and continued with their day-to-day activities as usual. In the case of Begum Sufia Kamal, the 86-year-old poet/writer and life-long activist, even her family members received death threats. Jahanara Imam's book *Ekattorer Dinguli* (translated as *Those Days of 1971*; the English language version is *Of Blood and Fire*) is considered an authentic diary as well as an autobiographical record from a woman's perspective. It vividly documents atrocities of the Pakistani military, its collaborators, and religious fanatics during the Liberation War in 1971. Her son Rumi, a freedom fighter, disappeared after being arrested and tortured by the Pakistani army; her husband was also tortured by the Pakistani army and later on died. With the formation of the Ekatturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee (Co-ordinating Committee for the Elimination of Collaborators and Assassins/Killers of 1971), Jahanara Imam successfully mobilized a mass movement. On March 26, 1992, in its own public court, with the support of a large crowd, the Committee sentenced Golam Azam, the *amir* (leader) of the right-wing religious party JI (Jamaat-i-Islami) to death for war crimes and asked the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) government to carry out the sentence. During the Liberation War, the JI had collaborated with the Pakistani military and had been condemned for its heinous activities. Despite numerous death threats and fatwas, Jahanara Imam pursued her crusade until her death in July 1995. Neither the international media nor Indian feminist groups/media ever paid any attention to her cause of bringing war criminals to trial!

I believe that the Nasrin affair was used by the BNP government to divert public attention from national politics and to create divisions between and among the opposition parties. Since March 1994, the AL (Awami League), the major opposition party, allied with the JD (Jatiyo Dal) and the JI to boycott sessions of Parliament. They pressed forward a number of demands, such as the resignation of the BNP government, and called for a national election under a neutral caretaker government. The alliance between the AL, considered the liberal and secular political party, and the JI, the Islamic religious party, was awkward as the JI had previously supported the BNP. The situation got worse as the opposition parties continuously called for nation-wide strikes and *hartals* (a stoppage of work in protest or boycott) and staged mass rallies and demonstrations (Hossain 1995).

When it was first published in a Calcutta-based newspaper, Nasrin's interview did not receive any publicity in Bangladesh. The BNP government at that time was led by Khaleda Zia in a fragile parliamentary democracy. According to Riaz, a

government-owned newspaper highlighted the interview "to create an environment conducive to filing a case against her" (1995, 25). In other words, the government's strategy was to use the Nasrin issue to diffuse public attention and create divisiveness within the opposition alliance. The government failed to comprehend the political wind and public mood, and eventually the government's strategy consolidated all religious groups - which ultimately formed another alliance to persecute Nasrin. The anti-government mood turned into an anti-Nasrin campaign and several pro-liberal newspaper offices were attacked and ransacked. Since the independence of Bangladesh the religious fundamentalists had never gained such strength publicly! (After the liberation in 1971, the then-AL government led by Sheikh Mujib had banned all political parties based on religion, a ban that was lifted in 1986.)

The BNP government faced a complex political scenario. On the one hand, it risked losing the support of religious fundamentalist groups that had swept the BNP to victory against the Awami League in the 1992 general elections. On the other hand, it faced pressure from Western donor countries - as Weaver commented, "Seemingly overnight, Taslima had become the Western world's symbol of freedom of expression and of women's rights, in opposition to the rise of religious intolerance" (1994, 56).

In India, the Hindu fundamentalist parties, such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), made every effort to use *Lajja* against the Muslims residing in India and used the book to demand the eviction of "illegal" Bangladeshis who were Muslims. As I mentioned earlier, the BJP even printed copies of *Lajja*, but deleted some parts of the novel which held the BJP responsible for provoking the Islamic fundamentalists in Bangladesh. It is clearly evident that the novel was used to strengthen the communal forces and the fundamentalist parties in both India and Bangladesh.

THE ROLE OF FEMINIST/WOMEN'S GROUPS: SUPPORTIVE OR AMBIVALENT?

The beginnings of formal women's organizations in Bangladesh are linked to the Liberation movement. During the mass movement against the military dictatorship of Pakistan in 1969, students, writers, peasants, workers, academics, journalists, and left-oriented women's groups actively participated in demonstrations, protests and marches. This mass movement intensified women's consciousness and resulted in the birth of Mahila Parishad (Women's Council) in 1970, currently Bangladesh's largest women's organization with more than 30,000 members. After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 and the First UN International Women's Conference held in Mexico in 1975, various women's groups emerged to change discriminatory policies towards women and promote gender equity.

Despite the diversity of these women's groups, from time to time they form alliances against the state and all forces of oppression, all of which has made the movement quite visible. For example, the women's groups formed an alliance in 1995 against the brutal rape and murder of a young woman, Yasmin (age twelve), by three policemen and forced the BNP government (led by Khaleda Zia) to take action against the police and local administrators. Without doubt, the women's groups in Bangladesh have strengthened their base and been successful in identifying women's issues as social issues - for example, rape, violence against women and children, women's rights in the workplace, property rights of women, divorce, and child custody.

At the early stages of the Nasrin controversy, liberal forces including writers, journalists, poets, and literary critics applauded Nasrin's boldness and supported her freedom of expression. Intellectuals, activists, journalists, and secularists formed a coalition and supported Nasrin's writings, but her confrontational stances, attacking well-known people personally through her column, and the geo-politics of her book, *Lajja*, cross-cut national boundaries and challenged what

Grewal and Kaplan (1994) call "inadequate and inaccurate binary divisions." Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kari (a non-government organization or NGO) remarked:

> Taslima went for the jugular, and we're not ready for that. There's simply too much at stake. You have to learn how to deal with the situation - how to handle the bearded ones. And that is something that Taslima never understood. (Weaver 1994, 58)

As Nasrin became more and more controversial (Mortaza and Rahman 1994), support for her within Bangladesh declined even more. As Weaver notes, Nasrin commented, "Only a few artists came to visit me when I was living underground. They were fearful and confused - they were cowards" (1994, 58).

Despite the support from international groups, such as Amnesty International, PEN, and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), women's groups in Bangladesh were ambivalent towards Nasrin. Her issue put women's groups in an awkward situation. They feared that Nasrin's writings might set off a conservative backlash against the movement, and indeed they did. Fundamentalists attacked various offices, particularly those of women's organizations and NGOs, burned down some NGO-run schools in the rural areas and claimed that the NGOs were anti-state, anti-Islamic organizations.

In spite of their later ambivalence, some feminist/women's groups tried to give Nasrin support. On June 12, 1994, The *Pioneer* - an Indian English daily - reported that some Bangladeshi women's organizations had signed a statement: "The case against Taslima must be withdrawn. It is the mullahs who should be put on trial for committing repression on women through fatwas and unauthorized Islamic courts" (Fazl 1994, 7).

There are three main reasons why Nasrin did not receive spontaneous and unequivocal support from feminist/women's groups. First, she had never been involved with any of the women's groups. In addition, she had never actively participated in any protests or demonstrations pertinent to women's issues. Second, fatwas and death threats had been issued occasionally to writers and poets like Nasrin, but not all reacted as she did. For example, the women's groups, whatever their internal differences, recognized and respected Begum Sufia Kamal, who received fatwas several times, but ignored them and pursued her daily activities as usual. In contrast, in the interview with BBC television, Nasrin smoked a cigarette while holding the Koran and taunted the religious fundamentalists. Through this act in the Western media, Nasrin alienated not only the general public, but also women's groups in Bangladesh.

Third, quite frequently, Nasrin underplayed and underestimated feminists and activists as well as writers (both female and male). This put her on a double edge. In her interview with the *Statesman*, for example, when she was pressed to make remarks about Begum Sufia Kamal and Jahanara Imam - highly acclaimed activists - Nasrin bypassed the question and commented that most women activists are afraid of fundamentalists, are affiliated with a political party and are happy to be "housewives" (Wright 1994, 21). Nasrin's disregard of feminist activists/women's groups either made them angry or forced them to be silent. They continue to be reluctant to be involved with anything related to her.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have discussed the Nasrin case in the context of local and cross-national processes to illustrate how contemporary feminist positions in Bangladesh are influenced by the geo-politics and colonial legacies of Bangladesh and India. The controversy raised by Nasrin drew various local, national and international forces into the fray, which eventually forced her to flee the country. In my opinion, the issue was internationally publicized, not to support feminist causes, but to highlight the rise of fundamentalist forces both in Bangladesh and India. Nasrin was a "pawn" in the political game played out by various forces for political gains. The international focus on Nasrin as a lone fighter against the religious

fundamentalist onslaught avoided questioning or examining colonial legacies, inter-communal politics and violence, the role of the state, and the transnational socio-economic, political processes; it also ignored the strength of the feminist/secular and leftist/writers' groups who had played vital roles during the 1969 popular uprising, the Liberation War of 1971, and the recently held 1996 general election, to name a few.

What about Nasrin and feminism in Bangladesh? Her book, *Lajja*, represented more geo-politics in the subcontinent than feminist views in Bangladesh. Nasrin did break the structural silence of her society on various women's issues, but her writings and her remarks went beyond what feminist/women's groups could support, and may have jeopardized their gains. After Nasrin's exile to Sweden in 1994, her case was not discussed by any feminist/women's groups in a public forum in Bangladesh. Even in the general election of Jatiyo Sangsad in June 1996, no individual or group raised Nasrin's case as an election issue.

Nasrin is still in exile. I hope that this paper stimulates dialogue and interest among feminists as well as activists (Bangladeshi/international) in post-colonial, transnational feminist issues in the sub-continent, especially in Bangladesh and India. The controversy surrounding Nasrin and her exile should not be treated simply as a local or Islamic fundamentalist issue, but as a geo-political, transnational feminist issue.

POSTSCRIPT

Since I completed the final revision of this paper, the Nasrin issue has once again hit the media in Bangladesh and in the West. Nasrin's recent (October 1998) return home sparked riots in the streets of Dhaka, which demonstrates that the religious fundamentalists' hostility against her remains undiminished despite her four years of exile. As I indicated earlier, while some women's groups in Bangladesh support Nasrin, Bangladeshi women's groups in general do not want her return to be an issue that diverts attention from other important women's rights issues: "Our problem is [that] the Western press and the Indian press have been building her [Nasrin] as the only issue," said Khushi Kabir, a leading women's rights activist in Dhaka as reported in *Kinesis* (November 1998). As reported in the *Vancouver Sun* (October 10, 1998), Farida Akhter, a Bangladeshi feminist, said, "Under no circumstances would we agree with the fanatics to cut off her head ... she is responsible for the fact that people are not coming forward to support her. Taslima Nasrin is not a women's movement issue, but an issue created by the international media." These responses provide further support to the general argument presented in this paper.

ENDNOTES

1. The paper is based on my research project, Women's Work and Social Change in Bangladesh, funded by the Simon Fraser University President's Research Grant (January 1996-August 1997).

2. This is an excerpt from my personal communication with Dr. Louise Sweet, former Professor of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, September 22, 1994. Dr. Michèle Pujol, a former colleague of mine in Women's Studies at the University of Victoria, in British Columbia, also motivated me to write this paper. Dr. Pujol organized a lecture, Feminism in Bangladesh, at the University of Victoria (March 22, 1996) and invited me to lecture on the Nasrin issue. While I am solely responsible for the content/analysis of this paper, I sincerely acknowledge Dr. Pujol's contributions in shaping some of my thoughts. The final version of this paper has benefited from comments by peer reviewers, particularly by Dr. Marjorie Griffin Cohen and Dr. Marilyn Porter, editors of *Atlantis*. I am thankful to all of them.

3. Also spelled Nasreen by various authors. I shall use "Nasrin" throughout the paper.

4. Fatwa is considered a religious opinion by clerics and is based on the interpretation of the Koran (the Muslim Holy book) and Sunnah (the teachings and activities of Prophet Mohammed). Religious leaders can deliver fatwas related to interpretation of Muslim rituals/text, but they have no authority to implement fatwa. Further, fatwas do not have any legal sanctions in Bangladesh.

5. "Communalism," which means the act (such as riot), advocacy and subtle, as well as overt, threat of violence along religious lines, is a term widely used in the Indian sub-continent when Hindus and Muslims propagate hatred and act violently against each other.

6. Salman Rushdie had earlier published a book with the same title: *Shame*.

7. Hindu Nationalists in India claimed that the Babri mosque in Ayodhya had been built on the site of the destroyed Ram temple (birthplace of God Ram); hence, on December 6, 1992, they launched a political protest to erect a Ram temple on the site of the Babri mosque. This culminated in the destruction of the Babri mosque by a large group of Hindu fundamentalists. For details, see Partha S. Ghosh, 1997.

SELECTED REFERENCES

Akhter, Farida. *Depopulation of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Narigrantha Prabartana, 1992.

Alam, Fazul. "Fighter Unto Death." *Savvy* (India) (November 1993): 30.

Alexander, M. Jacqui and Chandra T. Mohanty, eds. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

Amin, Aasha Mehereen. "Rebelling the status quo." *The Daily Star* (Nov. 4, 1993).

Ashworth, Georgina, ed. *A Diplomacy of the Oppressed: New Directions in International Feminism*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1995.

"Bangladeshi writer in hiding." *Outlook* (October/November, 1994): 7.

Bhattachrjea, Ajit. "If Taslima is arrested Bangladesh will be on trial." *The Pioneer* (June 16, 1994): 8.

Chowdhury, Kabir and Saikat Chowdhury. "Freeing the woman's body: Central to equality." *The Daily Star* (May 26, 1994): 8.

_____. *Taslima Nasreen and the Issue of Feminism*. Dhaka: Pratyasha Prakashan, 1997.

Das, J.P. "Extracts from *Nirbachita Kalam*." *Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society* 78 (Sept.-Oct. 1993): 28-29.

_____. "Enjoying a Woman." *Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society* 85 (Nov.-Dec. 1994): 19.

Fazl, Ahmed. "A pawn in the political game." *The Pioneer* (June 12, 1994): 7.

"Fundamentalists continue to call for Nasrin's death." *Globe and Mail* (August 31, 1994).

Ghosh, Partha S. "Bangladesh at the crossroads: Religion and politics." *Asian Survey* 33, 2 (July 1993): 697-710.

Grewal, Inderpal and Caren Kaplan, eds. *Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices: Scattered Hegemonies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Hossain, Golam. "Bangladesh in 1994: Democracy at Risk." *Asian Survey* 35, 2 (Feb. 1995): 171-78.

Islam, Shamsul. "The many-faceted struggle of Taslima Nasreen." *Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society* 85 (Nov.-Dec. 1994): 18-25.

"Islamic fundamentalists vow to kill woman writer: Defend Taslima Nasrin!" *Women and Revolution* 44 (Winter 1994-Spring 1995): 12-21.

Jayawardena, Kumari and Malathi De Alwis, eds. *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*. London & New Jersey: Zed Book, 1996.

Leeman, Sue. "Exiled author longs for home: Writer who fled Bangladesh to escape Islamic extremists has become an international symbol." *The Globe and Mail* (February 18, 1995).

MacWilliam, Ian. "Bangladeshi call to hang 'female Salman Rushdie.'" *The Observer* (London, England) (July 3, 1994): 21.

Morris, Nomi. "Fighting words: A poet forced into hiding by muslim extremists still speaks out for oppressed women." *Maclean's* (October 9, 1995): 44.

Mortaza, Golam and Kazi Mustafizur Rahman, eds. *Naribad, Samprodayikata o Taslima Nasrin* [Feminism, Communalism and Taslima Nasrin]. Dhaka: Barnayan, 1994.

Nasrin, Taslima. *Nasta Meyer Nasta Gadya* [Bad Girl's Bad Stories]. Calcutta: Anand Publishers, 1993.

Nasrin, Taslima. "The Wheel." Trans. by Fazul Alam. In *Infinite Variety: Women in Society and Literature*. Edited by Firdous Azim and Niaz Zaman. Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1994: 367-68.

"Police hunt for Muslim novelist over 'insult.'" *Vancouver Sun* (June 6, 1994).

Riaz, Ali. "Taslima Nasrin: Breaking the structured silence." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 27, 1 (January-March, 1995): 21-27.

Sangari, Kumkum and Sudesh Vaid, eds. *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989.

Sarkar, Tanika and Urvashi Butalia, eds. *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995.

Siddiqui, Zillur Rahman. "Foreword." In *Taslima Nasreen and the Issue of Feminism*. By Kabir Chowdhury and Saikat Chowdhury. Dhaka: Pratyasha Prakashan, 1997.

Stockholm, John. "In defence of the extreme." *The Globe and Mail* (June 13, 1994).

Weaver, Mary Anne. "A fugitive from injustice." *The New Yorker* (September 12, 1994): 48-60.

Wright, Carolyne. "Diary." *London Review of Books* (September 8, 1994): 20-21.

Zaman, Habiba. *Patriarchy and Purdah: Structural and Systemic Violence against Women in Bangladesh*. Uppsala, Sweden: Life & Peace Institute, 1998.

ISSN: 2349-2147

Modern Research Studies:
An International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

A Feminist Study on Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover*

SOYIMLA AKUM
PhD SCHOLAR (English)
Nagaland University, India
Email: qsoyimla@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Taslima Nasrin brings in a different aspect of her writing in *French Lover*. Known for her radical writings, Nasrin hold up to her nature by bringing in the east and west in contrast where she discusses the issues even to the extent of lesbianism which is not appreciated by general people to be openly discussed. The difference in culture of the east and the west is blended in the text to shape the protagonist. Nila is exposed to the world of the developed Paris where the people can do anything they like. However, the freedom that the people exercise can also be of distain for some and destructive element. The protagonist is uprooted from Calcutta to Paris but her identity as a dependent woman remains the same.

Keywords: marginalization, homosexuality, marriage, emancipation, feminism

© Dept. of Humanities & Social Sciences, NIT Agartala, India

Feminism as we know of today traces back to the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft who talked about education to women. She opines that women should also be given education so that they can take decision like men with reason. The writings of Wollstonecraft still inspire women writers across the globe and her argument is proved right by many upcoming and established women writers. Taslima Nasrin also adhered to her writings by writing about women issue not based on emotions but reason. She is not bias but brings forth prevalent situation in her novel. Feminism today is active not only in urban areas but it has spread to rural areas also. Activists work to bring attention to rural women who comprises majority of women population specially in third world countries which is highly uplifted by United Nations who gives the theme for International Women's Day 2018 as "Time is Now: Rural and Urban activists transforming women's life." This shows that women and common no matter where they live. They suffer in the hands of patriarchy though some of the enlightened families give opportunity to women like that of men.

Some decades back women were ashamed to speak about the ill-treatment or abuses but today we see women being vocal about being a victim. Society instead of emphasizing towards the victim blamed her and supported the oppressor. However, with education and reason women speak boldly asking for justice. Social media is also playing an important role in demanding justice and bringing to the world the clarity. For instance, the Me Too Movement (**#me too movement**) which became viral in the late 2017 is becoming more effective to break the silence of many women who were sexual harassed or raped in work place. It was started long back in 2006 but has gained popularity recently. The movement is sprouting its shoots all over and has spread its wings to many other countries including India and Bangladesh. Before the platform of social media, literature took the arena to bring in

the injustice and hence forth, French Lover is one such to show the struggle of being a woman.

Taslima Nasrin is an award-wining writer and human rights activist. She is widely known for her powerful writings on the oppression of women and her criticism on religious fundamentalism. Her writings are considered anti-Muslim and she was exiled from Bangladesh and issued multiple fatwas calling for her death. After being forced to leave Bangladesh she settled in India and USA. In many of her novels, Nasrin has discussed the issue of patriarchy and criticized religious fundamentalists. Nasrin's novel *French Lover* tells the story of the patriarchal control exerted on the protagonist Nilanjana by her father, her husband Kishanlal and the domination of friends and lover. When Nila speaks on behalf of Nasrin, she justifies her liberated escapades as the result of the lack of real love or affection in her husband's attitude towards her. The protagonist also reflects Nasrin's unsuccessful love life. When we speak of feminism in Bangladesh one cannot ignore the name of Taslima Nasrin as she is popularly known for her outspoken writings about the issues of women.

Nasrin through the journey of Nila shows to the readers the confluence between the east and the west. It becomes so hard for Nila to cope with the western culture since the world she knew in Calcutta is totally different from the world she is now. She faces a cultural shock. She leaves for Paris with full of dreams about her prince charming (Kishanlal) with full of expectations which later was failed. After landing on Paris she was held and kept in other room. She became a victim of racism and her friends and husband view it to be because she came from poor country (India). She was not introduced to harsh reality but kept confined to fantasy and imagination without allowing her reasoning thinking to develop that is why she married without second though. The sole motive rested upon her was to get married as no one in Calcutta will marry her after knowing that she had intimate relationship with her boyfriend who later abandoned her because of her caste.

Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* is of the opinion that patriarchy creates foreground which is lead by games and this games in the novel can be in the form of materialistic standards

before the protagonist. On reaching her husband's house, she is informed that the place is all set. There were machines to dust, wash, dry and even to beat the eggs, whip it, boil it and then cut into pieces. This reflects her situation where she is transported from her father's house to husband's care. In her husband's house she is more of a maid and a decorative piece than a wife. Her husband shows her off to his friends. Simone de Beauvoir in her "Introduction" to *The Second Sex* says men have always and everywhere paraded their satisfaction of feeling that they are kings of creation. She continuous to cite an example of Jews Morning Prayer, "Blessed be the Lord our God, and the Lord of all worlds that has not made me a woman," meanwhile, the wives resignedly murmur: "Blessed be the Lord for creating me according to his will" (Millet, 2000, p 31). This shows the hypocrisy of patriarchy where they constantly remind the female figure as inferior to them. A role of a dutiful wife as expected of Nila was to cook, clean and make her husband happy. A woman's role is like fluid which gets mixed with whatever situation she is placed. Here Nila becomes a living robot for her husband. When she was standing by the window in jeans, Kishan scolded her that a bride cannot dress like this. People will come to see her and that she should wear Sari and jewellery. This shows of how the marriage which was an escape from her house in Calcutta turned to be another house of suffocation. From the day she entered the house she is seen to be controlled by her husband. She is left on the foreground of the patriarchy where she is denied to free herself into what Daly would say 'realm of ecstasy'.

Nila's lifestyle was compelled to change after marriage. When Kishanlal reminds her of the dishes lying dirty of the previous night, she remembers Calcutta where she never had to give second glance. They were maids who would take and wipe it immediately after they finish. Her husband reminded her that the luxurious of Calcutta will not be available in Paris and that they have to even clean the toilet by themselves. Nila was confined to the walls of the house. She was not allowed to go anywhere. Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* writes that a woman who exercises and strengthens her mind becomes a companion to her husband rather than a humble dependent. Here, Nila is projected as more of a dependent than free woman.

When the word 'mariginalization' is applied in any discussion it can mean to direct several meaning. However in the case of Nila, she is at the edge where she is not allowed to mentally exercise herself. She has to ask permission from her husband even to go out of the house. She is seen as a child who is dependent and not a companion in their marriage. It is a stereotype attachment that a woman's goal is achieved when a husband is acquired but Taslima Nasrin shows that marriage is not the ultimate goal. Nila after marriage goes through transformation when she comes to a realization searching for the 'real her'. Suffocated in her husband's world, Nila tries it break the foreground and spins to what Daly would say 'background' to discover herself. On the process of her 'A-Mazing' journey she is faced with different circumstances. She comes across a young boy wearing earrings; a girl with brown lips, and tongue pierced, young boys and girls with their hair dyed and raised high and stiff as a sort of protest as many of the people did not like society's rule. Nila's sort of protest against her marriage was to leave her husband's house and shifted to her friend Danielle's house. Mary Daly says that patriarchy takes control over us when we give them access. Here, Nila cuts off the access so that she can 'exorcise' patriarchy of her life.

The journey towards her emancipation did not turn out easy even after cutting off the access of patriarchy. She is introduced to the world of homosexuality which she cannot even think of. India is still not open to free talk of Homosexual and Nila is astonished to see such people openly. Above all she was shocked to know that Danielle is also homosexual. She stayed with Danielle to escape the archetypal housewife who would cook, clean and who talks only to few people but she finds that she cannot fit in to a culture which is new to her. She had not only ever heard of sex between two women, she could not even stretch her imagination as far. In her journey to find herself she becomes the partner of Danielle. She leaves her husband but was again caught up in homosexual relationship. As we read through the text we can perhaps comment that homosexuality is not natural in Nila but was a result of social influence or insecurity towards men folk after her marriage failed.

The ill-treatment of women does not happen only in the third world countries but Nasrin has shown the readers that it happens even to the developed people. Through the life of Danielle, the writes shows the bitter experience of young Danielle where she was raped by her own father when her mother was out and she was playing. This can be one factor why Danielle chose to be homosexual. We can see one common nature in Nila and Danielle that they distain men in their lives because of their oppressive nature. It can perhaps be the one reason why they chose to build physical relationship with same sex. Nasrin through Danielle brings in the view that men use love as a web to trap women and continues "Women think they can't live without men. That's not true. Look at me. I don't need a man" (Nasrin, 2002, p 118). Nasrin in her life also faces several trust issues towards men. In her autobiographical book *Split: A Life* she exposes her failed affairs and the names of men who used her or sexually abused her. Some of the incidents mentioned in the book are seen in the story of Danielle who was raped by her own father. Nasrin was also raped by her own uncle when she was young. Failed marriage of Nila can also be seen as the failed marriage of the author itself.

Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* states "Needless to say there was and is no penalty imposed upon the male correspondent. Save in recent times or exceptional cases, adultery was not generally recognized in males except as an offense one male commit against another's property interest (Millet, 2000, p 43). This can be clearly applied to Nila's circumstances where her lover Sushanta had sexual relationship with but married someone whom his parents chose for him. Men get away with such situation as they maintain the upper hand but women are the ones who suffer the pain. Since she was not virgin she was looked down with contempt and concluded that no men in Calcutta will marry her. The view of Millet and the situations in the novels ally as we see the women being punished while the men not even questioned. No penalty was imposed on Sushanta while the female victim was tagged as immoral.

Nila's mother is another character who bears the wrong doings of her husband silently. She did not retaliate to her position but shifted her attention to her children. Elaine Showalter in her essay, "Towards a

Feminist Poetics" views that a woman can best portray the suffering of another woman as she had or has similar experiences. Hence, Nasrin in this novel brings her best to bring the hardships of different sections of women. The women characters in the novel are not just mere individuals but they are the archetypes of different Indian women. Molina (Nila's mother) can be compared to Ganthari in Mahabharata who stayed devoted to his husband even to the extent of living her life blindfolded. Devotion towards husband is good but the devotion that Molina harnessed towards Anirban can be seen as drowning her life into sorrow. She had opportunity to start her journey towards the realm of ecstasy but she chose to remain dutiful. Society brainwashes women that they are inferior to men and that they cannot survive without a male member in their life.

Patriarchy takes control of a woman in the form of father when she is at her father's place, husband after marriage and son after the husband dies. The cycle continues and thus she is not free to think beyond male figure in her life. Molina's devotion was so much so that she did not question to her husband having extra marital affair. Instead society applauded her husband of not divorcing his dark skinned wife. Indians have fascination towards fair complexion and this is one tool used by patriarchy to build low esteem of women. She has money acquired after selling her share from her father's inheritance but she did not use that money to keep her happy. She is one character who is hallucinated by the foreground spread by patriarchy. Nila says that her mother wasted all her life trying to please other people. In her duty to be a good daughter, good wife and good mother she forgot everything about herself. She lost her identity of being Molina. Patriarchy controls a woman's life even to the extent that she cannot laugh heartily because "…some stupid man somewhere has said that if you laugh too much you'll pay for it with tears" (Nasrin, 2002, p 54). Nila advises her mother to laugh without fear as life is not forever. However, Molina's life ended before she could live a life for herself: a life free from male maze.

Another character portrayed by Nasrin is Mithu, one of Nila's relative. Many men rejected her because of dark skinned and it is seen as her crime. Patriarchy instills in the minds that a woman should not

stay unmarried at her father's place. Mithu desperately wanted to get married even to the extent that she does not have problem if treated like a servant. Wollstonecraft's argument about marriage being a bond of compatibility and companionship is questioned through the character of Mithu. For her marriage is getting out of her father's place to escape being disgraced by the society. Society controls the lives of people specially women when it is about marriage: the certain criteria that a bride should possess neglecting 'love' which is essential between two individuals. Unable to cope with situation we see her committing suicide. The author writes that Mithu's family mourned but deep inside there was tinge of relief as they can now marry their son for a huge dowry. When it comes to dowry, the parents want male child so that they can acquire. The society and place in which the novel is based is such that they are relieved at the death of a dark unmarried daughter and excited to welcome someone else's daughter to their house.

Taslima Nasrin in her novel implies impressive narrative technique of novel-writing giving a vivid description of women's wretched condition in Indian society. She explores women's agony and at the same time suggests ways to fight back against these agonies. Through the character of Molina and Mithu we see how many Indian women fail to fight back against the oppressor and end their end without living for themselves. However, Nila represents a modern woman who wants to be psychologically and economically independent. She has seen her mother and Mithu's life ending without an individual identity. She is one character who does not want to be confined by the rules of the society. Being a woman in the world of dominated man was not easy but we see her overcoming and becoming one of an individual. The novel presents the plight of Indian women no matter where they live. Nasrin through the novel presents the myriad ways of how different women live their lives. The conclusion lies in the hands of the readers as each individual has different perspectives.

References

Nasrin, T. (2002). *French Lover* (S. G., Trans.). New Delhi: Penguin.

Nasrin, T. (2018). *Split: A Life*. (M. C.,Trans.). New Delhi: Penguin.

Daly, M. (1978). *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon.

Showalter, E. (1987). Towards a Feminist Poetics. In N. (Ed.), *Twentieth Century Literary Theory: A Reader*. London: Macmillan.

Wollstonecraft, M. (2014). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. London: Vintage.

Millet, K. *Sexual Politics*. (1969). New York: University of Illinois Press.

Beauvoir, S. D. (2001). *The Second Sex* (C.B, & S.M. Chivallier, Trans.). New York: Vintage.

21 FEMINISTS

in

21ST CENTURY

[https://medium.com/we-encourage/21-women-that-are-shaping-the-21st-century-354ce9ae6f38]

Countless times history has shown that behind every successful man, lies a powerful woman, and now more than ever those women are visible, claiming the spotlight. Meet the female leaders who are at the forefront of creating a thriving society where equality prevails, as it should. Meet the inspirational women of this century, who are going further, doing more, breaking stereotypes, and breaching the gap so that others can follow their paths.

"There are two powers in the world: one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a third power stronger than both: that of women."
>>> Malala Yousafzai

The contemporary female character differs exponentially from the traditional, already primitive, stereotype of the housewife. Women do rule the world now, from politicians, CEOs, engineers and public speakers, to scientists and entrepreneurs. They are present

in all professional sectors as a truly remarkable force, and while there are still some inequalities that need to change, they are slowly but surely aiming for and achieving, a more equal society. Change can be slow, but even the smallest ideas can change the world when they are dynamic and innovative.

We have assembled a list of female leaders from a wide range of fields, with different expertise levels and social backgrounds, who have shown resilience and excellence in different forms and are making this century "the century" for change and female empowerment. Here are 21 female figures, of all ages, who won't go unnoticed and will claim their place as essential changemakers in society. They are powerful examples to many and an inspiration for other trailblazers and rulebreakers.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has" >>> Margaret Mead

1. **Karren Brady**

She is known as the first lady of football and has worked in the game for over two decades. When she joined Birmingham City as the Managing Director in 1993, she received a devastating amount of sexism, a topic she often discusses in her interviews. A strong campaigner for women in business, she is a true impact character when it comes to encouraging women to pursue successful careers.

2. Phoebe Schecter

Britain's first female NFL coach, Phoebe has grown to be an inspiring sportswoman. She joined the Buffalo Bills as their Coaching Intern, before being appointed the Tight Ends Coach for the successful American Football team. During her incredibly successful

career, Phoebe was later named the Community & Grassroots Project Manager for NFL UK. From such an influential position, Phoebe has changed the face of American Football. She continues to inspire budding female coaches across the globe, proving that a male-dominated environment is just lacking female influence.

3. Michelle Obama

This powerhouse leader needs no introduction. American lawyer and writer, Michelle Obama, became a source of inspiration to millions in the U.S. when she became the first African American First Lady in 2009, during Barack Obama's eight-year presidential reign. Her impact was felt so strongly that she has become a role model for women across the globe, and a leading advocate for health, wellbeing, and education.

4. Indra Nooyi

A Board Director at Amazon and a regular keynote speaker at The World Economic Forum, Indra Nooyi has earned a spot on the Forbes list of The World's 100 Most Powerful Women. Knowledgeable, experienced, and a top-level Director, she has become a must-have authority at international conventions.

5. Bonita Norris

Summiting Everest is without any doubt, the challenge of a lifetime and one you would expect to take many years to prepare for. Bonita Norris, however, gained adulation for achieving senior climber status and climbing to the top of the world in just two tough years. This amazing achievement made her the youngest woman ever to reach the summit, at just 22 years of age.

6. Emma Gonzalez

When her school was invaded by a gunman who killed many of her friends, she stood up to let the world know that she and her classmates demanded change. She brought the world to tears with one of the most courageous speeches of our time. Still leading the fight, with her dedicated team, against gun laws, Emma Gonzalez will not be going away anytime soon.

7. Malala Yousafzai

Known as the youngest Nobel Prize laureate the world has ever seen, this remarkable young woman overcame an assassination attempt by the Taliban in occupied Pakistan at the age of fifteen, to campaign for women's rights and children's rights to an education. To advocate in an area where the Taliban pose a serious threat makes her a contemporary heroine. Yousafzai has fought life and limb for what she believes in.

8. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, also known by her initials AOC, is an American politician and activist. She has served as the U.S. representative for New York's 14th congressional district since 2019, as a member of the Democratic Party. She is the Northeast-educated, Bernie-supporting, community-organizing and wall-protesting, powerhouse daughter of a working-class Puerto Rican family, who has broken down many preconceived prejudices and is aiming to transform the U.S. political scene.

9. Rep. Jahana Hayes

Sometimes for there to be a first, you have to become the first. This is what Rep Jahana Hayes represents for the many who will walk the path that she has built and leads to this day. She is an American educator and politician serving as the U.S. representative for Connecticut's 5th congressional district since 2019. In her own words, lies a powerfully inspiring message.: "I never expected to win," said Jahana Hayes, the first African-American woman to represent Connecticut in Congress. "I thought it would be a damn good try, and people would get encouraged, and then the next time someone else would do it."

10. Brandi Carlile

Since the dawn of the suffrage movement, innumerable queer women — many of them artists — have played a key role in the battle for women's rights. From suffrage songs to today's pop hits, how do queer female musicians share messages about justice, equality, and change? How are modern artists informed by the past, and how does their music imagine a more equitable future? Brandi Carlile is a five-time Grammy-winning singer and songwriter and helps answer all these questions for us.

11. Kamala Harris, Vice President, US

Kamala Harris has been a trailblazer in U.S. politics and is the current Vice President. She was the district attorney general of San Francisco from 2004 to 2011 and attorney general of California from 2011 to 2016. She is also the first woman and the first African American to hold these posts. During this period, she made headlines for criminal justice reforms.

12. Deja Foxx

You might have heard about 18-year-old Deja Foxx from her heartfelt testimony to former Arizona Senator Jeff Flake at a local town hall in 2017, which instantly went viral in the media. Featured as one of Teen Vogue's 21 under 21 in 2018, Deja has become a fierce advocate for accessible and affordable reproductive healthcare for all women, especially those who live in poverty.

13. Lane Murdock

In the fallout of the devastating shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, DoSomething member Lane Murdock posted a petition to encourage a student walkout to protest against gun violence. The 17-year-old would never have foreseen that her petition would evolve into a nationwide movement, with more than 2,500 schools participating in the National School Walkout on April 20, 2018.

14. Dana Canedy

A former Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for the New York Times, in 2020 Dana became the first Black person to lead a major publishing house, Simon & Schuster. A decisive stepping stone for change and a leading point for black women to transform contemporary literature. She also authored the bestselling memoir, Journal for Jordan, about her deceased partner, a veteran of the Iraq War.

15. Dawn Davis

Dawn became Editor-in-Chief of Bon Appétit magazine — one of the preeminent U.S. cooking publications — in the Fall of 2020. She is the first Black Editor-in-Chief of the

brand. In her first piece for the magazine, she wrote, "when the call came to leave book publishing to take the helm at this storied magazine as it reckoned with racial and cultural equity, it was impossible to resist."

16. Samira Nasr

After a prolific career in fashion, Samira Nasr became the first Black Editor-in-Chief of Harper's Bazaar in 2020. "I just want to bring more people with me to the party," she told the Washington Post in February 2021, "because I think that's going to make it more interesting." Before Harper's Bazaar, Nasr worked for media companies such as Vogue and Allure magazines in New York City.

17. Gloria Jean Watkins (bell hooks)

As a professor and social activist, bell hooks changed how universities taught the intersection of race, gender, and class. Over the course of her life, she authored more than 30 books — including her 1981 foundational text, *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism*, which transformed feminism in the 1980s and 1990s. "I choose to re-appropriate the term 'feminism'," she said in this text, "to focus on the fact that to be 'feminist' in any authentic sense of the term is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression."

18. Octavia E. Butler

Butler was the first science fiction writer to win a MacArthur Genius Fellowship in 1995. In her lifetime Butler produced more than two dozen novels that explored themes of Black injustice, women's rights, the climate crisis, and political issues. "I write about

people who do extraordinary things," she said. "It just turned out it was called science fiction."

19. Jesmyn Ward

Jesmyn is a novelist and creative writing professor at Tulane University. After receiving a degree in writing from the University of Michigan, Ward published her first book in 2008 and has published six novels since. Ward is the first woman to win the National Book Award twice for her works, *Salvage the Bones* (2011) and *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017).

20. Fridah Ntarangwi — Kimathi

Fridah Ntarangwi — Kimathi is a managing partner in Zidicircle, a platform that promotes inclusive entrepreneurship and financing for the diaspora entrepreneurs and SMEs in Africa, collectively graduating hundreds of diaspora entrepreneurs. She has 16 years of financial sector experience ranging from entrepreneurial financing, impact investments management, crowdfunding, portfolio management, and more. She is a business coach and has supported several start-ups to scale up. In the last five years, she has actively participated in migrant and diaspora engagement activities within the European Union, being awarded by the EMEN project of the European Union (EU) for promoting inclusive entrepreneurship in the EU and bestowed the Duisenberg title 'Woman in Finance'.

21. Robin Laird

Robin Laird is the founder of Health Curious, a platform that offers tracking tools and lifestyle support for bariatric surgery patients. Laird is a fashion model turned

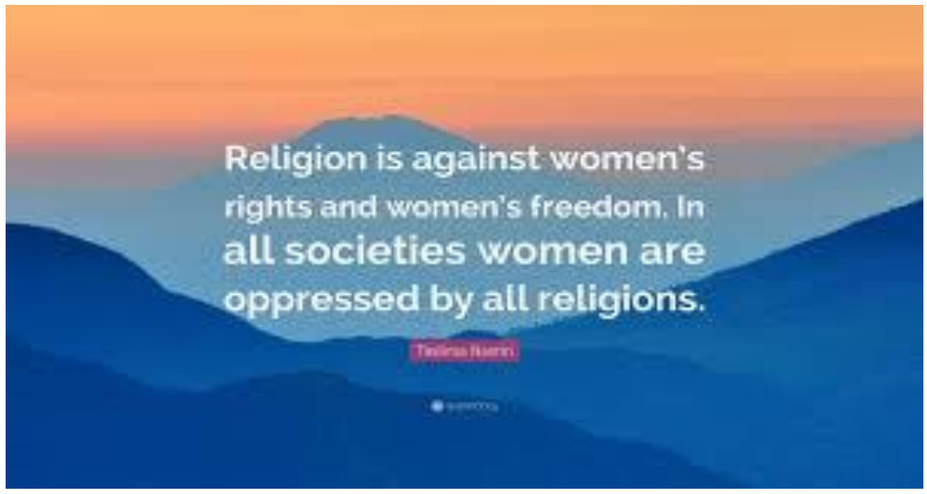
biochemist (with an MSc from the University of Amsterdam) and a certified health coach through the Institute for Integrative Nutrition.

(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)

Quotes

of

Taslima Nasrin



Religion is now the first obstacle to women's advancement. Religion pulls human beings backwards, it goes against science and progressiveness. Religion engulfs people with a fear of the supernatural. It bars people from laughing and never allows people to exercise their choice.

I support the rights of all people to practice their religious beliefs privately, but I oppose the idea of respecting religions. In truth, I have no respect for any religion. I believe religion is not compatible with human rights, women's rights, or freedom of expression.

I want to live in Kolkata; I don't want to live in Europe - I can't write there. I write in Bengali, and I need to be surrounded by the Bengali language and culture.
— Taslima Nasrin —
AZ QUOTES

Religion, society and state - from none of these do women get their proper honour. It is religion, which has created an unparalleled disparity between men and women.

Religion, society and state - from none
of these do women get their proper honor.
It is religion, which has created an unparalleled
disparity between men and women.

It is said that peace is the basic tenet of all religion. Yet it is in the name of religion that there has been so much disturbance, bloodshed and persecution. It is indeed a pity that even at the close of the twentieth century we've had to witness such atrocities because of religion. Flying the flag of religion has always proved the easiest way to crush to nothingness human beings as well as the spirit of humanity.

There is no such thing as a 'superior' or 'inferior' culture, there are only various cultural patterns which make up this beautiful, multicolored mosaic.
— Taslima Nasrin —
AZ QUOTES

In traditional societies, we have a long legacy of men controlling the body and mind of women. Such societies have valorised motherhood and fabricated concepts like chastity. Women have been the victims of these notions for thousands of years.

**The fundamentalists are increasing.
People, afraid to oppose those fundamentalists,
shut their mouths. It is really very difficult to
make people move against a sensitive issue like religion,
which is the source of fundamentalism.**

I was well acquainted with the Calcutta literary circle since I was 17, when I lived in Bangladesh and published and edited a little magazine called 'Sejuti,' for which young poets from both Bengals wrote. If you look at my life, there is no question of using anyone for anything. I have only got banned, blacklisted and banished.

The focus of my research is how secular movements originated in West Asian countries and subsequently changed to pan-Islamic movements. The role of Western countries in this aspect is also a part of the research.
— Taslima Nasrin —
AZ QUOTES

It is said that peace is the basic tenet of all religion. Yet it is in the name of religion that there has been so much disturbance, bloodshed and persecution. It is indeed a pity that even at the close of the twentieth century we've had to witness such atrocities because of religion. Flying the flag of religion has always proved the easiest way to crush to nothingness human beings as well as the spirit of humanity.

According to Abdul Kalam Azad, 'It is one of the greatest frauds on the people to suggest that religious affinity can unite areas which are geographically, economically, linguistically and culturally different.

The Bengalis saw endless bloodshed and trouble from 1947 to 1971 and this culminated in the Liberation War of 1971. The blood of 3 million Bengalis helped earn this freedom and also proved that religion could never be the foundation of a national identity. Language, culture and history provide the foundations for a national identity.

Among all the 'awards' that I have hitherto collected, I consider the title of 'patita' or 'fallen woman' to be the highest. This is an achievement of my long-struggling life as a writer and as a woman.
— Taslima Nasrin —
AZ QUOTES

If you are rich, it doesn't matter whether you are Hindu or Muslim, that is how a capitalist society works. Take a look, poverty-stricken Muslims are in a similar situation. The rich, be they Hindu or Muslim, are subjugating the poor.

If I say that I'm educated and was jobless
in Dhaka, that I want to work here,
build myself a healthy, beautiful life,
the kind of life that everyone dreams of,
they'd just throw me out of the country.
Political asylum they may just allow,
but economical asylum - never!

Religion is now the first obstacle to
women's advancement. Religion pulls
human beings backwards, it goes
against science and progressiveness.
Religion engulfs people with a
fear of the supernatural. It bars people
from laughing and never allows
people to exercise their choice.

When Bangladesh refused to renew my passport, I used U.N. travel documents. You can't disown your country.
Taslima Nasrin
EnQuoted.com

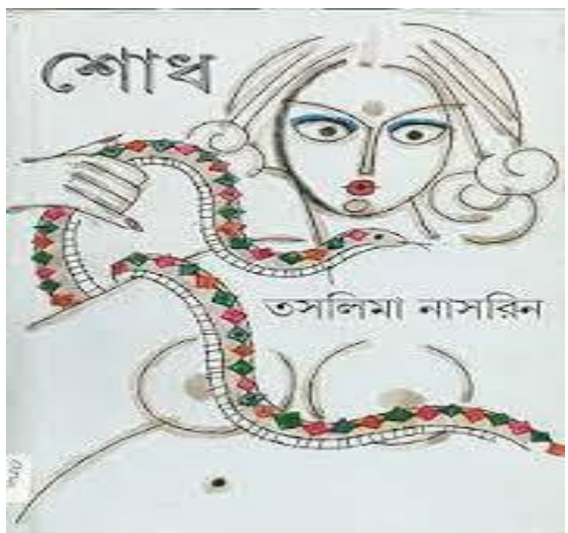
People don't leave their homeland simply because governments stage events. One's native land is not like the soil we put in flowerpots, where we pour water and fertilizer and then change the soil after an interval.

Those religions that are oppressive to women are also against democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression.

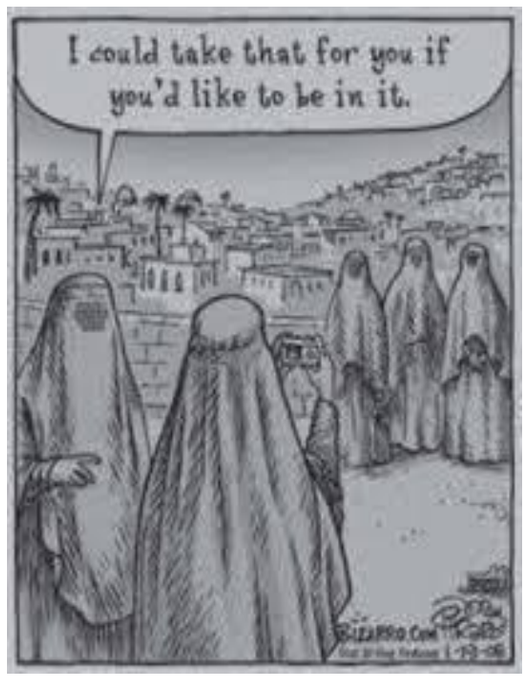
I have had fatwas issued against me, some three in Bangladesh and another five in India. I will not be cowed by these threats and shall fight for my rights.

Cartoons

"I'm quite pleased with your new appearance. Now you are finally behaving like a proper woman!"

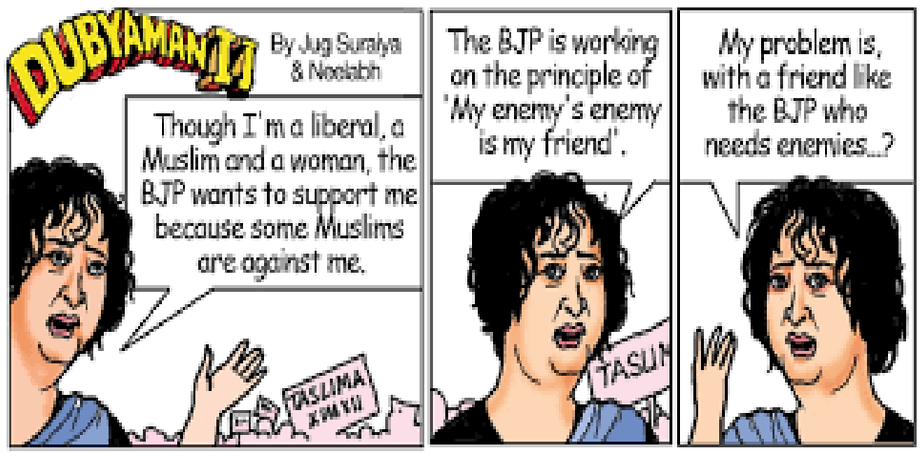


YOU KNOW WHAT THE JOB MARKET IS REALLY GOING TO NEED IN 10 YEARS? CONSUMERS.
ROBO-CAREER COUNSELOR
F
forbes.com/cartoons


I could take that for you if you'd like to be in it.

CAN YOU IDENTIFY THE SHOPLIFTER?

DUBYAMAN!!!
By Jug Suraiya & Neelabh
As a liberal, I'm all for freedom of expression and I want Taslima to stay. But as a liberal I'm sensitive to minorities' wishes and I want Taslima to go.
So, as a liberal you don't know if Taslima is coming or going?
No, as a liberal I don't know if I'm coming or going?


DUBYAMAN!!!
By Jug Suraiya & Neelabh
Though I'm a liberal, a Muslim and a woman, the BJP wants to support me because some Muslims are against me.
TASLIMA
The BJP is working on the principle of 'My enemy's enemy is my friend'.
My problem is, with a friend like the BJP who needs enemies...?

TASLIMAJI, YOU DESERVE INDIAN CITIZENSHIP!
MAY I COME IN?
BJP CHECKPOST
WELCOME TO INDIA!

BORIS!
JOHN! I MISSED YOU SINCE THE COLD WAR
ARMS FOR THE OPPOSITION
CIA
Syria

"Your Children Need Your Presence More Than Your Presents."
"Parents Are The Ultimate Role Models."

'PICTURE OF THE DAY'
LET ME HELP YOU TO CROSS THE ROAD

All morning you have been standing next to me...
I'm waiting for you to make a discovery that I can then claim the Quran knew it!
Tell me what you want?
Arabic Translated Memes

All the religions waiting for a positive response from science...👍👍

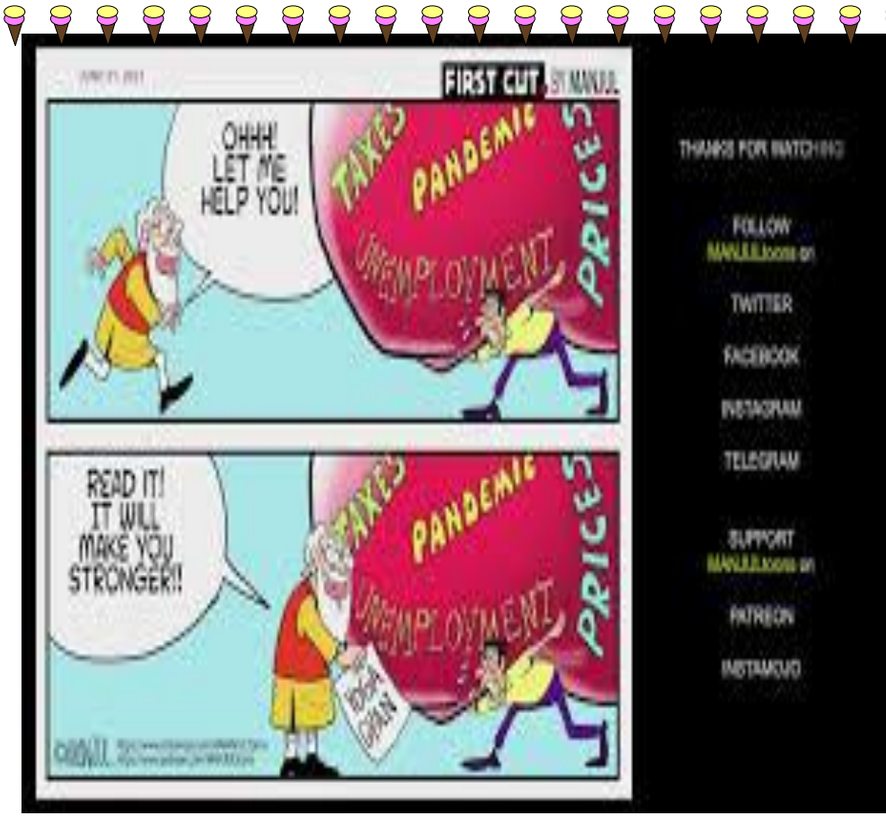
Steve Hanke @steve_hanke · 1h
Bangladesh's AUTHORITARIAN PM Sheikh Hasina's Idea of FREEDOM OF SPEECH = UNPLUG THE INTERNET.
INTERNET
INTERNET

THEN
INTOLERANCE
AKHLAQ
DADRI
U.P.
AUTHOR
MEDIA
ACTOR
BOLLYWOOD
NOW
TOLERANCE
POLICE STATE
MALDA
W.B.
AUTHOR
MEDIA
ACTOR
BOLLYWOOD
A TALE OF TWO CITIES

I stand in solidarity with Kashmiris...
SHIA & HAZARAS
BALOCH GENOCIDE
MINORITIES GENOCIDE
SINDHIS
BENGALI GENOCIDE
MUHAZIR GENOCIDE
PASHTUNS

IT'S.. MY..
CHOICE..
GENDER
APARTHEID
BURNEY

FREEDOM OF
EXPRESSION.
POLICE


FIRST CUT BY MANJUL
OHHH! LET ME HELP YOU!
TAXES
PANDEMIC
UNEMPLOYMENT
PRICES
READ IT! IT WILL MAKE YOU STRONGER!!
BRAIN
THANKS FOR WATCHING
FOLLOW MANJULA.com on
TWITTER
FACEBOOK
INSTAGRAM
TELEGRAM
SUPPORT MANJULA.com on
PATREON
INSTAMOJO

JUST RELAX- THEY ARE JUST HERE TO TELL YOU WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT DO WITH YOUR BODY-

FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW
HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW
I still 'Stand' by my decision...!!

It's your turn.
Sinicization Policy
KOREAN
TIBETAN
UYGHUR

US Anti-Terror Fund ' KICKBACK '...
PAK ARMY
@PAKFACTSHEET

DON'T JOIN THEM. WE'RE THE AUTHORISED AGENT TO HEAVEN & 72 VIRGINS!
AL-QAEDA
ISIS
AL-QAEDA ANNOUNCES INDIA WING

SHOOT! BEFORE HE UNLEASHES HIS DANGEROUS SMILE!

United Stakes of America
US
PAK
ISI
ISIS
JIHAD INC
TALIBAN
LET

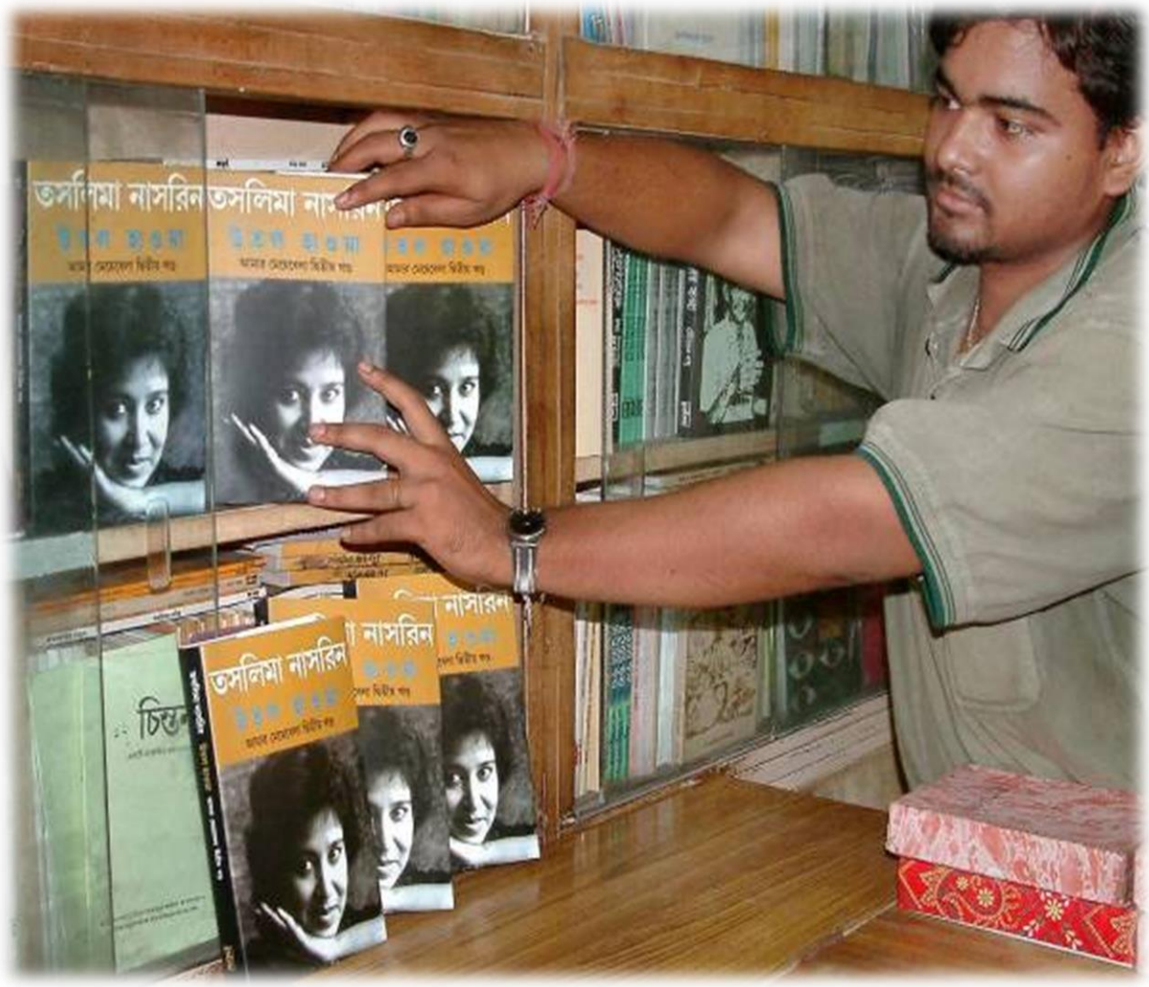
WOMEN WHO DRESS
LIKE ME GET RAPED AND
SEXUALLY ABUSED TOO
IT'S NOT ABOUT
WHAT WOMEN WEAR

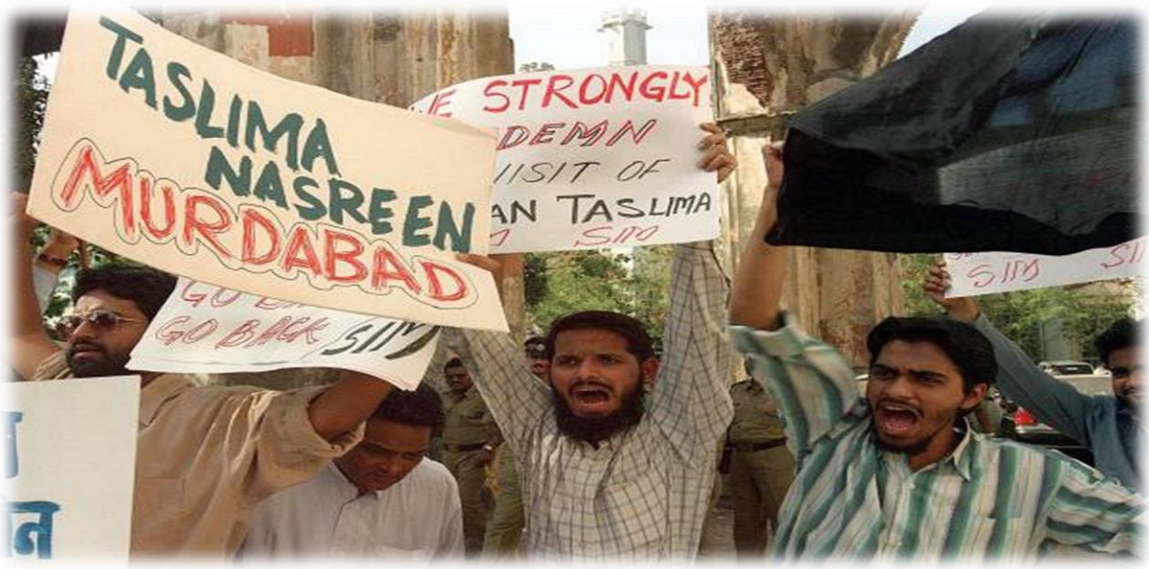
Photos

&

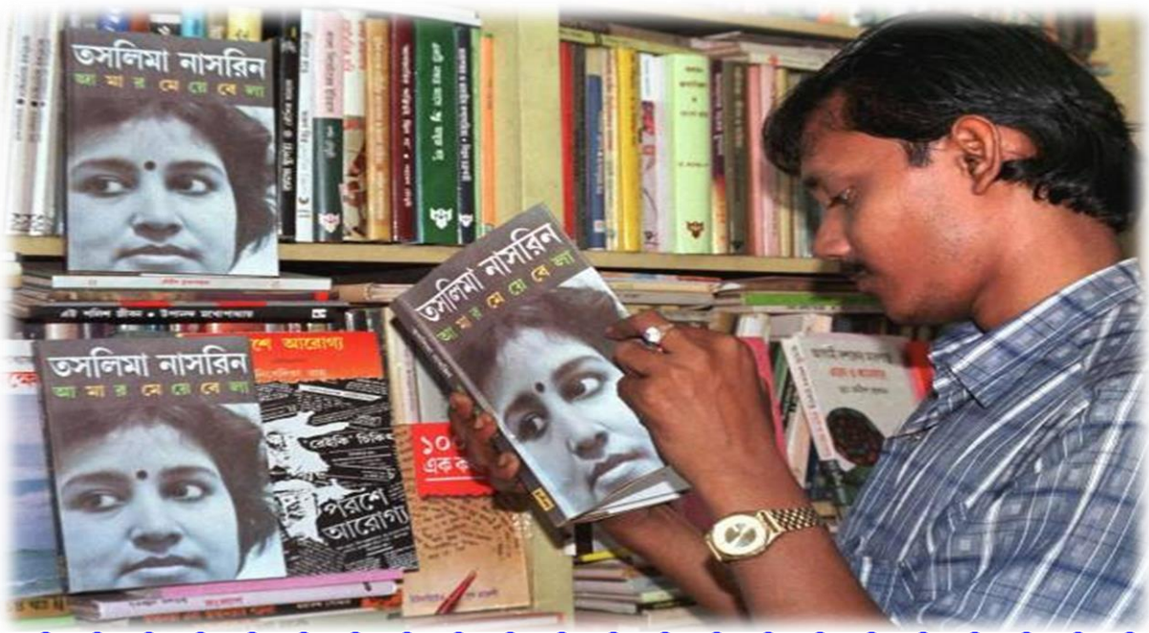
Images

TASL
NA


তসলিমা নাসরিন


TASLIMA
NASREEN
MURDABAD
STRONGLY
DEMN
ISIT OF
AN TASLIMA
GO BACK

TASLIMA
ASREEN-GO
BACK


তসলিমা নাসরিন
তসলিমা নাসরিন
তসলিমা নাসরিন

র গ্রেফতার, মৃত্যুদণ্ড ও রাজধানীতে মূর্তি স্থাপনের দা
শান্তিপূর্ণ মিছিলে পুলিশী হামলার প্রতিবাদে
ক্ষোভ সমাবেশ ও মিছিল

TASLIMA
NASREEN-GO
BACK
TASLEMA
GO BACK

ইসলামের দুশমন তসলিমা ঢাকায় কেন?
শেখ হাসিনা জবাব দাও
ইসলামী শাসনতন্ত্র আন্দোলন, ঢাকা মহানগর।

CENTER FOR INQUIRY- India
CENTER FOR INQUIRY
India
Promoting reason, science, and freedom of inquiry

Dress Circle
ARISTOCRAT

ব্লাসফেমি এ্যাক্ট প্রবর্তনের চক্রান্ত প্রতিহত করুন
খুনী যুদ্ধাপরাধী, ফতোয়াবাজ ও ধর্মীয় ফ্যাসিবাদীদের বিরুদ্ধে
লেখক-শিল্পীদের সমাবেশ ও মিছিল

La Bosnie
libre

बेशरम
बेशरम
बेशरम

Selected Articles

on

Taslima Nasrin

The following 13 articles on the Novels of Dr Taslima Nasrin provide the variety and depth of her literary skill.

****

01] Violence and Women: A Critical Study on Taslima Nasrin' Novel *Shodh*

Attadeepa Maurya, Dept of English, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra, India

02] Gender Discrimination and role of Modern Literature in the Fiction of Taslima Nasrin with special reference to *Lajja*

Junaid Khalid Khan, Lecturer, Department of English, GDC Boys Kupwara, Jammu and Kashmir

03] Tale of Female Body: A Critical Study of Taslima Nasrin's Novels *Shodh* and *French Lover*

Gaurav Kumar, Research Scholar, Jiwaji University, Gwalior, MP and
Dr Bharati Karnik, Research Supervisor, Maharani Laxmi Bai Govt College of Excellence, Gwalior, MP

04] Taslima Nasreen as an Iconic Feminist

Dr KK Sunalini, Assoc Prof of English, KL University

05] An Analysis On Portrayal Of Relationship Intimacy In Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover*

Napolean Joseph & Dr KN Sharmila

06] Nasrin Gone Global: A Critique of Taslima Nasrin's criticism of Islam and her Feminist Strategy

Md Mahmudul Hasan, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

07] The Taslima Nasrin Controversy and Feminism in Bangladesh: A Geo-Political and Transnational Perspective

Habiba Zaman

08] Rhetorical Analysis of Women's Status and Social Injustice in Taslima Nasrin's Speech and Interview

Ganga Ram Paudyal
Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara

09] A Study of Feminist Ideals in Taslima Nasreen Works an Iconic Feminist

Gaurav Kumar, Research Scholar, Jiwaji University, Gwalior, MP and
Dr Bharati Karnik, Research Supervisor, Maharani Laxmi Bai Govt College of Excellence, Gwalior, MP

10] A Site of Subaltern Articulation: The Ecstatic Female Body in the Contemporary Bangladeshi Novels of Taslima Nasrin

Published: Dec. 1, 1999 • By Saiyeda Khatun

11] Taslima Nasrin: A Background Paper

Meredith Tax, Chair, International PEN Women Writers' Committee, New York,S November 1993*

12] Religion and Patriarchy in Taslima Nasrin's Lajja: An Intersectional Approach

Ganga Ram Paudyal
Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara, Nepal

13] Exploring the Socio-Religious Feminist Struggle of South Asian Third World Women Against the Labyrinthine Gossamer of Patriarchy in Selected Bangladeshi Fiction

Hassan Bin Zubair
PhD Scholar (English Literature), Department of English, National University of Modern Languages, Pakistan

International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention
ISSN (Online): 2319 – 7722, ISSN (Print): 2319 – 7714
www.ijhssi.org Volume 3 Issue 5‖ May. 2014‖ PP.23-25

Violence and Women: A Critical Study of Taslima Nasrin's Novel Shodh

Attadeepa Maurya
(Department of English, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra, India)

ABSTRACT : *Violence against women is an age old practice which has now become a major issue of concern in today's world. It has been witnessed that in any kind of war whether it is civil strife, communal clashes or World Wars women have been the major victims of violence, torture and humiliation. The theme which preoccupies the mind of the writer in the novel Shodh is gender bias which eventually results in revenge. Being herself a victim of the patriarchal structures Taslima Nasrin has seen things very closely that how women are given the role of a subordinate where they cannot, in anyway, assert their right to freedom, right to a healthy life and right to equality. Thus, her novel Shodh is a shattering blow to the hegemonic patriarchal set up where a woman's fidelity is constantly under the shadow of suspicion and doubt thereby subjecting her to physical and mental anguish and pain. This paper focuses upon the different dimensions of violence and their impact on the female protagonist Jhumur, who eventually takes a stand for establishing her own identity in the patriarchal set up.*

KEYWORDS: *Humiliation, Maltreatment, Oppressed, Subordinate, Transformation*

I. INRODUCTION

Violence against women is an age old practice which has now become a major issue of concern. Contemporary women poets like Adrienne Rich, Emily Dickinson and many have endeavoured to bring transformation through their writings by portraying the roles which are assigned to women from time immemorial. Besides these poets, many women novelists have also portrayed the plight of women, their struggle and sufferings due to the perpetrators of violence either, in the name of culture, religion or societal norms. In the history of English literature the writers who belonged to the school of art for art's sake said that the objective of literary piece is to give aesthetic pleasure to the reader but so far as the literary writers are concerned they are the product of the society, thus it is impossible for them to detach themselves from the world they live in. Therefore, the purpose of literature is not only to write for art's sake but also for life's sake so that the hidden truths of life would come in the lime light.Violence is a prominent issue in today's world as the world has witnessed two World Wars and numerous Civil Wars in one or the other country which became a reason of devastation and massive carnage all over the world. Hence, the literary writers are prone to portray the loss and sufferings which they have witnessed in their family, country or the world at large. Thus the most controversial novelist Taslima Nasrin's readings and scrutiny of her major novels viz. *Shodh* (1992) and *Lajja* (1994), clearly reveal that she believes in the theory 'art for life's sake' not art for art's sake.

Nasrin does not write to entertain the idle reader, instead she writes with a purpose and this purpose is to oppose and fight against injustice, oppression and gender bias. She became a voice of the marginalized and the victims who endeavour to survive in the cult of violence and anonymous authority which is probably be named as social, religious or patriarchal. The theme which preoccupies the mind of the writer in the novel *Shodh* is gender bias which eventually results in revenge. Being herself a victim of the patriarchal structures she has seen things very closely that how women are given the role of a subordinate where they cannot, in anyway, assert their right to freedom, right to a healthy life and right to equality. Moreover this issue obsesses Nasrin's mind so much that in almost each of her novels she takes up this theme either directly or indirectly. Eventually, it is obvious to say that a woman is the subordinate and man is the other who has all the rights to oppress, subjugate and violate therefore, a woman becomes the victim of violence. It is important to understand the concept of violence which is enforced most frequently now and then by their male counterparts or the other.Violence can be of mental or physical nature, inflicted at subjected, interpersonal or collective levels in the social, political, religious or domestic domain. Usually women have been the greatest sufferers in domestic violence and that is a major problem in the society of every nation. Violence against women is an "act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or sufferings to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty of her occurring in public or private life.

Some important causes of violence against women are sexual harassment, forced marriage, victims of rape, son's preference and suspicion." [1] Under such circumstances, women have always been suppressed and tortured. The last few decades have focused much attention on the specific group and its sufferings though the problems are age old. In fact, the Indian epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana are also the examples of age old maltreatment, torture, suppression, beatings and humiliation of women.The pathetic condition of women in society is itself an indicator of the low value set on women's lives, and their suffering is very well in tune with the social system and life pattern. Being a close witness of all these sufferings and humiliations Taslima Nasrin could not stop herself from portraying all such themes in her novels. Taslima Nasrin (1962-) is a Bangladeshi doctor, turned author, who has been living in exile since 1994. She works to build support for secular humanism, freedom of thought, equality for women and human rights by publishing, lecturing and campaigning. Early in her literary career, she wrote mainly poetry with female oppression as the theme. She started publishing prose in the early 1990's, and had produced three collections of essays and four novels before the publication of her controversial novel *Lajja* in 1994. Her other novels are *Oporpkho* (1992), *Shodh* (1992), *Nimontron* (1993), *Forashi Premik* (2002), and *Shorom* (2009).

Shodh is a story of revenge, dealing with a young woman Jhumur who is an educated girl and marries the man whom she loves. She breaks the news of her pregnancy to her husband, Haroon hoping to make him happy but to her utter dismay he accuses her of cheating on him by saying that it was not easy to conceive in six weeks and he puts an allegation that she wanted to get married to him hurriedly because she was carrying someone else's seed in her womb as he says, "…it's not possible to become pregnant in six weeks."[2] He forces her to get the child aborted which casts a deep psychological impact on Jhumur, so that she becomes vindictive and decides to avenge herself. In spite of being an educated, courageous and open minded woman her voice in the house-hold matters is suppressed. Radhika Coomraswamy says in her book Violence Against Women, "the refusal to recognize women's economic independence and empowerment is one of the main reasons for violence against women, accentuating thereby, their vulnerability and abuse."[3] Similarly, Jhumur whose independence, dreams of happiness in marriage and child bearing are shattered when her husband Haroon forced her to abort her first offspring. This left a menacing and dark impact on her psyche which was impossible to heal. Usually in the patriarchal society it has been witnessed that "women are terrorized and even killed for being unable to produce a male child. Parental preference for son gives rise to female foeticide."[4] On the contrary Jhumur's case is entirely different but the irony occurs when she conceives early and is accused of carrying some other man's child in her womb. This allegation and mental wound kills her spirit to live and shatters all her preconceived notions. Thus, through the character of Jhumur, Taslima Nasrin exposes the ugly face of sophisticated elites of society and who under the cover of material well being rob their women's happiness and mental peace. Nasrin lays emphasis on a woman's perpetual struggle against all odds to create a niche for herself. Jhumur cannot cultivate a sense of belongingness to the home of her husband, Haroon because there is lack of love, harmony, mental peace and mutual understanding.

Through the story of Jhumur and Haroon, Nasrin lays stress on the need for love, harmony and a little freedom in relations, while before marriage Jhumur and Haroon seem to be a perfect couple, the relationship loses its charm once the egocentric, suspicious and chauvinistic male supersedes the lover Haroon. Nasrin very closely examines the negative impact that such disharmony in married relationship creates upon the woman concerned. Eventually in order to avenge herself Jhumur gets intimate with Afzal, a paying guest in her house, and finally gives birth to a son, labelling him as Haroon's son. Haroon's loving of the baby ardently, thinking him to be his own son is highly ironical and serves the novelist's purpose of casting a shattering blow to the hegemonic patriarchal set up where a woman's fidelity is constantly under the shadow of suspicion and doubt thereby subjecting her to physical and mental anguish and pain. Jhumur feels happy and doesn't harbor any guilty feelings about bringing Ananda, her son into the world of Haroon and his family. She adheres to her action and says:

> I took recourse to that to avenge the indignity I suffered. I'm not so insignificant, or of no account, that I'll swallow my utter humiliation in the hands of my husband and remain forever beholden to him."[5] She goes on to say, "my heart swells with happiness when Haroon cuddles Ananda and calls him 'Baba'. I have doused the fire of suspicion that had raged ferociously in Haroon;s heart and left mine charred, with waters from the fountain of joy that has bedewed me from within.[6]

There are several witnesses of women's oppression and torture, they have been the prime victims of violence in every communal strife, riots and wars. It is aptly said by Dr. Archana Sinha, "it has been quite distressing experience all over the world that in any conflict, a war, civil strife, communal riots or disturbances women and children became the prime victims of violence.

Children are orphaned and women are not only widowed but also become victims of rape."[7] Like Taslima Nasrin some other literary writers have explored this issue of violence against women in their works. During the cataclysmic event i.e. the partition of India, women were abducted, raped and killed brutally. Therefore, the partition and post partition writers like Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam , Bapsi Sidhwa, and Amitava Ghosh have portrayed the plight of women and their unimaginable sufferings in their novels. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is a vivid portrayal of women's misery and savage killings whereas Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* is a revenge story set in the wake of partition. Pritam has shown how women become the prime victim of violence and prone to unimaginable torture and humiliation at the hands of the people belonging to the other community.

Thus to conclude, it is apt to say that patriarchal system in the society is the root of male hierarchical order where power is enjoyed by them only and as violence accompanies power-it does nothing except giving torture to a person who is powerless. Focault has also supported this concept of power as he has said that power is dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body and it is aptly associated in the case of Jhumur, where she is compelled to get the child aborted because Haroon has power to which Jhumur is subjected and surrendered. It has been witnessed that a relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things it forces and results in harmful and devastating actions. Nasrin's focus is laid upon the drastic impact of the abortion case on Jhumur i.e. how she becomes vindictive and eventually succeeds in avenging herself to the best she could do. Hence, it has been experienced universally that "male violence exceeds female violence and exploiters, oppressors give way to the exploited and oppressed to counter violence."[8] The suppression of Jhumur's voice and her desires compelled her to act in a diverse form which ultimately gives her courage to establish her own identity and regain her self respect and individuality besides being a wife, mother, daughter in law. Jhumur's words are actually motivating for every woman to take a stand in order to maintain her own individuality and respect. She says:

> I feel I'm strong. That I am someone, separate and distinct from me as Haroon's wife, Ananda's ma, Ma-in-law's Bouma, Dolon, Hasan, Habib's Bhabi…No. I'm Zeenat Sulatana, Jhumur, a teacher. I am not something to be flung away, I'm not a thing, something, anything to add grace to a house, to embellish a family….Haroon recognizes I won't tolerate his cruelty; that I am no his slave; that I dare. I have remade my own life. I love Haroon without surrendering myself, without doing away with all my aspirations.[9]

Nasrin has expressed her experience regarding violence, exploitation, oppression, subjugation and discrimination of women in the patriarchal society. Probing deep into the psyche of her characters, she graphically delineates the traumatic impact of violence on the protagonist and other family members. Nasrin's novel tries to make the people aware of the importance of love, cordiality, harmony which is essential for the progressive and peaceful life of the human beings.

REFERENCES

BOOKS

[1] Bishoyi, Deepak. *Dimensions of Gender Problem.* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House. 2007). 74. Print
[2] Nasrin, Taslima.*Shodh*. (New Delhi: Shrishti Publishers and Distributers. 2003).73. Print.
[3] Shah, Niroj. *Women and Violence*. (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. 1989). Print
[4] Coomaraswamy, Radhika. *Violence Against Women*. (Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publishers. 2002). 29. Print
[5] Nasrin, Taslima.*Shodh*. (New Delhi: Shrishti Publishers and Distributers. 2003.)201. Print
[6] Nasrin, Taslima.*Shodh*. (New Delhi: Shrishti Publishers and Distributers. 2003.)201. Print
[7] Sinha, Dr Archana. "Conceptual Study of Violence Against Women-The Sociological Dimension", *Women and Violence. (*New Delhi: Radha Krishna. 1978.) 43. Print
[8] Shah, Niroj. *Women and Violence*. (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. 1989). Print
[9] Nasrin, Taslima.*Shodh*. (New Delhi: Shrishti Publishers and Distributers. 2003).201. Print

IJCRT.ORG ISSN : 2320-2882

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Gender Discrimination and role of Modern Literature in the Fiction of Taslima Nasrin with special reference to *Lajja*

Junaid Khalid Khan[1]
Lecturer
Department of English, GDC Boys Kupwara
Jammu and Kashmir

ABSTRACT: Taslima Nasrin, a Bangladeshi writer, paid not only national but also international attention in 1994 when a vague group of religious fundamentalists declared a fatwa sentencing her to death and demanding her trial on charges of blasphemy. Women have to play different roles like mothers, faithful wives, sisters, defensive angels governed by male dominated society. In Indian the head of the family is either father or any eldest male. The main focus of this paper is to explore Gender discrimination, feminism and role of modern literature in the fiction of Taslima Nasreen. In this paper different theories of discriminations like gender and feminism and the opinions of the people have been discussed. It gradually proceeds to the understanding of how most of the works were perceived by the reader with reasons for such change in her perception about men.

Key words: Discrimination, Gender, feminism, Religion, Perception, Theories

Taslima Nasrin, a physician by profession, has been writing on the concern of women's iss right from 1980. Between 1989 and 1994, she penned down nineteen books and wrote columns for various local daily and weekly newspapers. Of the books, seven were novels, one was a collection of short stories, seven were collections of poems, and four were volumes of articles previously published as newspaper columns. Her straightforward and provocative style made her well known and controversial in Bangladesh. Nasrin's writings

not only attack on the religion but also her writings shows men as agents of oppression. Her frequent themes in her writing are gender discrimination and the violence against women in native nation. She uses vivid language to depict the condition of women in the country

The distinction on the basis of gender revolves around the physical embodiments, performances of gender. People kept nature and human; man and woman separate and thus easily classify the perceptions and suggestions within these boundaries, even though gender is innermost to the organization of different nations as separate social and cultural systems. This was never only the part of biology but was reflected in religion also.

Taslima Nasrin exemplifies the woman who goes beyond the boundaries and is maltreated. To exemplify, "In 1993, a fundamentalist organization of Islam declared fatwa against her. Instead to support her, the then government favoured the fundamentalists and seized her passport, asked her to stop writing and even banned her book *Lajja* (Shame) in which she explored violences done by Muslim fundamentalists against Hindus. *Lajja* is a kind of work which deals with several themes of atrocities of men towards women. In fact, Nasrin explains the ways how patriarchal attitude challenges not only individuality but self-respect of women her society. One if the interview in which she states that "everything she has written is for the oppressed women of Bangladesh." She further stated that "she has wrung her heart out into her words"[2]. One of the most important feminist issues that have been dealt with in the novel of Taslima Nasrin is the healing and treatment of women at the hands of various patriarchal institutions like family and society headed by a patriarch who either looks down upon women or marginalizes them. Gender differences inform the very core of most conflicts between cultures, further complicated by race. Gender relations are also equally to understanding and developing a national identity. This paper highlights and critical analyses the various ways that different people have responded to cultural contact with Taslima Nasrin novels through the physical, rhetorical, political, and social implications of gender performances.

In her exploration of gender violence, Taslima Nasrin believes that gender violence include racism and inequality, conquest, occupation, colonialism, warfare and civil conflict, economic disruptions and poverty" is due to the male dominance in few societies. Such violence is usually buried within the supremacy of ordinariness, hidden in the routine details of everyday life" often "invisible and normalized" by dominant

society. Hence, the objective of this paper is to explore Gender, feminism and modern literature in the novels of Taslima Nasreen and its critical apprehension.

It is sardonic that the Republic of Bangladesh which accords nationality to its people, ultimately deprives the same countrymen of the basic fundamental rights due to traditional religious beliefs. The demolition of Babri Masjid in India witnessed so many casualties and tortures to the Hindu families in Bangladesh, and particularly the women were cruelly brutalized, sufferred and raped. Even the unkind nature of Hindu men ultimately affected the lives of Hindu women more negatively as they were left to the face of malicious Muslim fanatics. A feminist writer denounces conduct of women as objects of lust, physical and psychological violence. With the same pain Nasrin does with tremendous intensity as she explores it in her novel *Lajja*, how women are sexually harassed, abducted and subjected to varied kinds of torture that may even result in their deaths. Taslima demonstrates the abduction of Hindu girls is common in Bangladesh and how the hooligan even don't have any kind of fear. The women are abducted according to their whims and fancies and were subjected to various types of cruel treatments. With the passage of time most of the Hindus sent their daughters to India for their education and mostly for security purpose . Thus, the females as portrayed in *Lajja* are nothing more than objects to be used by the male predators to satisfy their lust. *Lajja*, depicts certain men ravishing young Hindu girls for their contentment. The abduction of Maya as a child of six illustrates the same. This incident terribly traumatizes the girl and has such an indifferent effect on the consciousness of the girl child that she is not able to behave normally for two months. She would sleep fitfully and would wake up abruptly in the middle of the night. The family is never secure thereafter as they keep receiving threatening through unidentified extortion letters that aimed at kidnapping Maya again. In *Lajja* too, this aspect comes to light as there are women framed as good or bad by the patriarchal setup. One who happily accepts patriarchal norms and adapts in accordance with its demands is labeled as 'good' as in case of Kironmoyee. At every step in the novel, she is portrayed as an ideal wife who serves the family and makes all possible sacrifices to keep the family going. As discussed above, another female character namely Shamima Begum is termed as a 'slut' and looked down upon as she sleeps with several men thereby violating/ transgressing the patriarchal code. She is, in fact, viewed as a bad or fallen girl. Islam mandates purity and virginity as virtues. Likewise in certain folk cultures too obsession with purity/ virginity is romanticized. "In folk culture, tales, stories, and fables, mostly in the oral tradition, always romanticize the physical purity of

the female body. Numerous tales of heroic women killing themselves rather than succumbing to sexual assault are very much a part of Bangladeshi folk culture. Thus, when a girl attains puberty, her parents immediately begin to suffer from a social anxiety about how to save their daughter's purity so that she can be regarded as a marriageable 'good girl.' This can be ensured by marrying daughters off as soon as possible'. The vindictive attitude of men, where they tend to ravish women on the basis of the latter's religious background, and then reducing them by terming them as 'good' or 'bad' according to their suitability gets reflected in the novel. The society depicted in Lajja, is deeply patriarchal. Here, discrimination on the basis of sex or one's gender identity is a norm. To discriminate, it is necessary to first 'otherise' women (as Simon De Beauvoir observes in The second Sex). There are innumerable examples of gender discrimination in the novel. For, Nasrin's own life narrative stands as an evidence to prove how woman is discriminated against and how attempts are made to gag her voice by those who cannot see women articulating their thoughts and resisting injustice done to them by those who are stuck with patriarchal mindset. Nasrin powerfully makes her point in one of her interviews challenging fundamentalists with closed mindset. "They issue fat was to try to stop people speaking against them? They can kill anyone in the name of God. They want to kill me, they demand my death only for the reason that I am alone; I am afraid, so I must be afraid of them and stop my writing. If I stop my writing, women will lose conscience because the fundamentalists like to oppress women to show their power. So they are not used to seeing that women can protest and are surprised if they do. They want to keep them down. So I think for women, protesting is more dangerous.". Thus, it is not easy to protest in a country like Bangladesh simply because it may provoke the ire of the mullahs representing a closed, patriarchal mindset. At one point in time, even Taslima Nasrin was proud of her beautiful country Bangladesh and felt privileged on account of its rich heritage and culture. However, she eventually became victim of the vindictiveness of the Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh who deprived her of nationality by issuing fatwa against her and banished her from her own country simply because she exposed the "Islamic republic of Bangladesh" which Bangladesh actually has become on account of religion-centricity, rather than its pseudo-official counterpart "People's Republic of Bangladesh" (*Lajja* 207) recorded in the national annals as a camouflage. Towards the end of the novel, however, Maya is killed and the Hindu Dutta family eventually decides to moves to India—a decision that has the narrative of pain, humiliation, insecurity, fear, and mindless killings embedded in it .

Through the foregoing discussion, an attempt has been made to analyze marginalization of women along with that of the religious minority as depicted in *Lajja*. Evidently a protest novel, Nasrin situates it in the context of religious fanaticism that reared its ugly head in Bangladesh in the wake of the demolition of Babri Masjid in India in 1992. Nevertheless, the novel also exhibits immense potential to be studied from a feminist perspective. The representation of the female characters, their treatment at the hands of Muslim male fundamentalists as well as Hindu males at the level of family, society or religion/ nation, and the fate they eventually meet are some points of discussion which make the text worth feminist analyses. The feminist thrust of Nasrin in view of the issues pertaining to women, the problems faced by the marginalized Hindus in Bangladesh, and the notions of nation and religion have been intricately woven together in Lajja. As nation is a geo-political entity, so is the body of the woman which is marauded, tortured and abused simply because the narrow nationalistic and fanatic mindset views it as an extension of the former thereby causing what has been discussed above as double marginalization of the women. Further, the boundaries of feminism are not limited to the cause of women as they can be extended to the cause of underprivileged ones. Thus, the anti-fundamentalism stance of the novel also envelops anti-patriarchal resistance wherein gender identity is privileged over religion particularly when Nasrin delineates atrocities against women in the same way as religion (Islam) supersedes nationalism when it comes to the abuse of the religious minority (Hindus). Thus, the gender extremism and religious fundamentalism go hand in hand throughout the text subjecting the female characters like Maya to inhuman torture until she dies. Hers is not only the death of a woman but also of that inner assurance of survival on the part of the Hindus in their 'very own' country as Sudhamoy would believe at one point in the text prior to when his daughter breathes her last.

The dirty male nature has been discussed by many feminist writers and Taslima Nasrin is no exception. However, what differentiates her from the rest is that she dares to express this, despite living in a male-dominated, orthodox, and radical society like Bangladesh. Her novel *Lajja* provides an explicit testimony of this intrinsic male nature . Taslima Nasreen in defense of his criticism in one of his interviews said that laws should be based on equality, not on religion; women should have equal rights in marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. I said we must stop stoning women to death in the name of religion. Is that provocation? Every civilized state has questioned the relationship of the state with religion, eventually disentangling and distancing the two. Islam should not be exempt from the critical scrutiny that other religions

have gone through. My opinion is based on my belief in secular humanism. If that is provocative, then it is absolutely necessary to provoke (The Hindu). This sadistic nature of men is not only limited to their interaction with women but also with other men. All it needs is a chance to come out in the open. However, women became an easy target to bring out this trait during the 1992- 93 riots in Bangladesh as Taslima documents the rape of thousands of Hindu women by Muslim rioters. Nasreen concludes that a man establishes his unfathomable might by practicing such sadism on other weaker human beings. This sadism does not merely involve physical abuse but also comes in the form of psychological suppression, social exclusion and so on. Caste system practiced by Hindus as well as Muslims is another way for sadism where men from the upper strata of the society find a customary way to deny certain fundamental rights to life. Nasreen also emphasizes that sadism is almost an exclusive male characteristic targeting other weaker sections of society, men as well as women. Despite many scientific innovations credited to men, Taslima's observations and depictions find men to be socially regressive. She denotes that a truly progressive society is one which has got equal opportunities, respect, and treatment to women. Spending her youth in an Islamic nation makes her belief even stronger and it enforces her to believe that men are responsible for socially regressive position of women. Lack of education, healthcare, nutrition, and fundamental right to expression for women, observed by Taslima made her a rebel author. As she wrote about this regressive male nature, the hardliners wrote her of as anti-Islamic. At the same time, the ruthlessness with which she attacked the orthodox, suppressive, male dominance in a nation driven by religion is inexplicable. Many critics compare her with another exiled and celebrated author 'Salman Rushdie' (Bodman and Tohidi). While talking about the regressive mind-set of men, Taslima emphasizes that religious conformity is the most important cause for this. According to her, Islamic world could not match the western progress as the Muslim clerics focus on establishing an environment dominated by religion rather than rational thoughts. With this novel, Taslima Nasreen too becomes an home-grown feminist, unwilling to give up even in the face of separation from his own people and literary critics. Several critics accuse him of negatively portraying Native people to gain familiarity. Taslima was part of discussion, possibility, and new perspectives in all the news channels, debates and palimentry affairs. Furthermore, the novel forces readers to question the status and security of that are in confined boundaries and binaries. Thus, reading the novel of Taslima Nasreen with an Indigenous feminist consciousness and gender bias that allows and encourages critical discussion and demonstrates the hopes and values of achieving balance in the society if such things that are barriers to female empowerment.

REFERENCES

1. The Hindu. Suvojit Bagchi. (2015). don't call me Muslim, I am an atheist' March 2, 2015.
2. Alam, Shansul S. M. (1998). "Women in the Era of Modernity and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Case of Taslima Nasreen of Bangladesh." Signs. 2.23, 429-61. JSTOR
3. . Beauvoir, Simone de. The Second Sex. Random House: Vintage, 1949. Print.
4. Nasrin, Taslima. (2006). "Dissident Women's Voices Coming out of Islam." Off Our Backs 36(3): 42. JSTOR. Web. 30 Apr. 2015.
5. Nasrin, Taslima. (1993). Lajja. New Delhi: Penguin, 1993. Print.
6. Quiglay, Meve (1995). "The Fatwa's in the Fire." Fortnight, 339: 24-25. JSTOR.
7. Nayar, Pramod K. (2006). Literary Theory Today. New Delhi: Prestige, 2006. Print. [8]. Tyson, Lois. (2006). Critical Theory Today. Noida: Routledge, 2006. Print

International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN : 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Tale of Female Body: A Critical Study of Taslima Nasreen's Novels Shodh and French Lover

Gaurav Kumar[1], Dr. Bharati Karnik[2]

[1]Research Scholar, Jiwaji University, Gwalior, M.P
[2]Research Supervisor, Maharani Laxmi Bai Govt. College of Excellence, Gwalior, M.P

Abstract

Violence against women is an age-old practice which has now become a major issue of concern in today's world. It has been witnessed that in any kind of war whether it is civil strife, communal clashes or World Wars women have been the major victims of violence, torture and humiliation. Women have been supposed as caring mothers, faithful wives, loving sisters, defensive angels governed by male domination society. India is a society in which father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line and as such become vibrant with male female issues especially in joint families. The themes which preoccupy the mind of the writer in the novels Shodh and French Lover are gender bias which eventually result in revenge. Being herself a victim of the patriarchal structures Taslima Nasreen has seen things very closely that how women are given the role of a subordinate where they cannot, in anyway, assert their right to freedom, right to a healthy life and right to equality. Thus, her novel Shodh is a shattering blow to the hegemonic patriarchal set up where a woman's fidelity is constantly under the shadow of suspicion and doubt thereby subjecting her to physical and mental anguish and pain. This paper focuses upon the different dimensions of violence and their impact on the female protagonist Jhumur, who eventually takes a stand for establishing her own identity in the patriarchal set up. Nasreen's next novel French Lover tells the story of the patriarchal control exerted on the protagonist Nilanjana by her father, her husband Kishanlal and the domination of friends and lover. This article on French Lover and Shodh focus on the predominant thematic concerns of Nasreen as a feminist. French Lover and Shodh are her medium to convey her views on various sociological, political issues which encompass not only the fate of any nation but also that of women everywhere. The analysis focuses on the failure of marriage in the case of various individuals, especially all the chief characters. Nasreen may be construed as justifying the frustration of Nila at her shabby treatment by Kishanlal and subsequently abandoning her husband. When Nila speaks on behalf of Nasreen, she justifies her liberated escapades as the result of the lack of real love or affection in her husband's attitude towards her and his former French wife.

Keywords: Humiliation, Maltreatment, Oppressed, Subordinate, Transformation

INTRODUCTION

The long exiled author Taslima Nasrin is not just a novelist. She is an equally powerful poet and holds a strong position in global intelligentsia. Her novels in spite of their controversial themes upholds women's issues which formerly were not addressed. Nasrin's representation of her own narrative etched a new path of unabashed laying out of women's personal histories marred by socio-cultural instruments of oppression.

The author's understanding of the women's ground reality is most intensely reflected in almost all her works of fiction and non-fiction. The connection between the biological and the social identities of women, as Nasrin has tried to suggest through her works not only shows her deep empathy for her own gender but also her visible resistance against the brutal paradigms of patriarchy. Her protagonists come from different economic, religious, socio-politcal, cultural backgrounds and she carefully plods her line of narration by emphasising on both similarities and dissimilarities shown by them in terms of their respective roles and context.

Violence against women is an age old practice which has now become a major issue of concern. Contemporary women poets like Adrienne Rich, Emily Dickinson and many have endeavoured to bring transformation through their writings by portraying the roles which are assigned to women from time immemorial. Besides these poets, many women novelists have also portrayed the plight of women, their struggle and sufferings due to the perpetrators of violence either, in the name of culture, religion or societal norms. In the history of English literature the writers who belonged to the school of art for art's sake said that the objective of literary piece is to give aesthetic pleasure to the reader but so far as the literary writers are concerned they are the product of the society, thus it is impossible for them to detach themselves from the world they live in. Therefore, the purpose of literature is not only to write for art's sake but also for life's sake so that the hidden truths of life would come in the lime light. Violence is a prominent issue in today's world as the world has witnessed two World Wars and numerous Civil Wars in one or the other country which became a reason of devastation and massive carnage all over the world. Hence, the literary writers are prone to portray the loss and sufferings which they have witnessed in their family, country or the world at large. Thus the most controversial novelist Taslima Nasreen's readings and scrutiny of her major novels viz. Shodh (1992) and Lajja (1994), clearly reveal that she believes in the theory "Art for life's sake" not art for art's sake. Nasreen does not write to entertain the idle reader, instead she writes with a purpose and this purpose is to oppose and fight against injustice, oppression and gender bias. She became a voice of the marginalized and the victims who endeavour to survive in the cult of violence and anonymous authority which is probably be named as social, religious or patriarchal. The theme which preoccupies the mind of the writer in the novel Shodh is gender bias which eventually results in revenge. Being herself a victim of the patriarchal structures she has seen things very closely that how women are given the role of a subordinate where they cannot, in anyway, assert their right to freedom, right to a healthy life and right to equality. Moreover this issue obsesses Nasreen's mind so much that in almost each of her novels she takes up this theme either directly or indirectly. Eventually, it is obvious to say that a woman is the subordinate and man is the other who has all the rights to oppress, subjugate and violate therefore, a woman becomes the victim of violence. It is important to understand the concept of violence which is enforced most frequently now and then by their male counterparts or the other. Violence can be of mental or physical nature, inflicted at subjected, interpersonal or collective levels in the social, political, religious or domestic domain. Usually women have been the greatest sufferers in domestic violence and that is a major problem in the society of every nation. Violence against women is an "act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or sufferings to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty of her occurring in public or private life. Some important causes of violence against women are sexual harassment, forced marriage, victims of rape, son's preference and suspicion." [1] Under such circumstances, women have always been suppressed and tortured. The last few decades have focused much attention on the specific group and its sufferings though the problems are age old. In fact, the Indian epics like the Mahabharata

and the Ramayana are also the examples of age old maltreatment, torture, suppression, beatings and humiliation of women. The pathetic condition of women in society is itself an indicator of the low value set on women's lives, and their suffering is very well in tune with the social system and life pattern. Being a close witness of all these sufferings and humiliations Taslima Nasreen could not stop herself from portraying all such themes in her novels. Taslima Nasreen (1962-) is a Bangladeshi doctor, turned author, who has been living in exile since 1994. She works to build support for secular humanism, freedom of thought, equality for women and human rights by publishing, lecturing and campaigning. Early in her literary career, she wrote mainly poetry with female oppression as the theme. She started publishing prose in the early 1990"s, and had produced three collections of essays and four novels before the publication of her controversial novel Lajja in 1994. Her other novels are Oporpkho (1992), Shodh (1992), Nimontron (1993), Forashi Premik (2002), and Shorom (2009). Shodh is a story of revenge, dealing with a young woman Jhumur who is an educated girl and marries the man whom she loves. She breaks the news of her pregnancy to her husband, Haroon hoping to make him happy but to her utter dismay he accuses her of cheating on him by saying that it was not easy to conceive in six weeks and he puts an allegation that she wanted to get married to him hurriedly because she was carrying someone else's seed in her womb as he says, "…it's not possible to become pregnant in six weeks."[2] He forces her to get the child aborted which casts a deep psychological impact on Jhumur, so that she becomes vindictive and decides to avenge herself. In spite of being an educated, courageous and open minded woman her voice in the house-hold matters is suppressed. Radhika Coomraswamy says in her book Violence Against Women, "the refusal to recognize women's economic independence and empowerment is one of the main reasons for violence against women, accentuating thereby, their vulnerability and abuse."[3] Similarly, Jhumur whose independence, dreams of happiness in marriage and child bearing are shattered when her husband Haroon forced her to abort her first offspring. This left a menacing and dark impact on her psyche which was impossible to heal. Usually in the patriarchal society it has been witnessed that "women are terrorized and even killed for being unable to produce a male child. Parental preference for son gives rise to female foeticide."[4] On the contrary Jhumur's case is entirely different but the irony occurs when she conceives early and is accused of carrying some other man's child in her womb. This allegation and mental wound kills her spirit to live and shatters all her preconceived notions. Thus, through the character of Jhumur, Taslima Nasreen exposes the ugly face of sophisticated elites of society and who under the cover of material well being rob their women's happiness and mental peace. Nasreen lays emphasis on a woman's perpetual struggle against all odds to create a niche for herself. Jhumur cannot cultivate a sense of belongingness to the home of her husband, Haroon because there is lack of love, harmony, mental peace and mutual understanding. Through the story of Jhumur and Haroon, Nasreen lays stress on the need for love, harmony and a little freedom in relations, while before marriage Jhumur and Haroon seem to be a perfect couple, the relationship loses its charm once the egocentric, suspicious and chauvinistic male supersedes the lover Haroon. Nasreen very closely examines the negative impact that such disharmony in married relationship creates upon the woman concerned. Eventually in order to avenge herself Jhumur gets intimate with Afzal, a paying guest in her house, and finally gives birth to a son, labelling him as Haroon's son. Haroon's loving of the baby ardently, thinking him to be his own son is highly ironical and serves the novelist's purpose of casting a shattering blow to the hegemonic patriarchal set up where a woman's fidelity is constantly under the shadow of suspicion and doubt thereby subjecting her to physical and mental anguish and pain. Jhumur feels happy and doesn't harbor any guilty feelings about bringing Ananda, her son into the world of Haroon and his family. She adheres to her action and says: I took

recourse to that to avenge the indignity I suffered. I‟m not so insignificant, or of no account, that I'll swallow my utter humiliation in the hands of my husband and remain forever beholden to him."[5] She goes on to say, "my heart swells with happiness when Haroon cuddles Ananda and calls him „Baba‟. I have doused the fire of suspicion that had raged ferociously in Haroon;s heart and left mine charred, with waters from the fountain of joy that has bedewed me from within.[6] There are several witnesses of women's oppression and torture, they have been the prime victims of violence in every communal strife, riots and wars. It is aptly said by Dr. Archana Sinha, "it has been quite distressing experience all over the world that in any conflict, a war, civil strife, communal riots or disturbances women and children became the prime victims of violence. Children are orphaned and women are not only widowed but also become victims of rape."[7] Like Taslima Nasreen some other literary writers have explored this issue of violence against women in their works. During the cataclysmic event i.e. the partition of India, women were abducted, raped and killed brutally. Therefore, the partition and post partition writers like Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam , Bapsi Sidhwa, and Amitava Ghosh have portrayed the plight of women and their unimaginable sufferings in their novels. Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan is a vivid portrayal of women's misery and savage killings whereas Amrita Pritam's Pinjar is a revenge story set in the wake of partition. Pritam has shown how women become the prime victim of violence and prone to unimaginable torture and humiliation at the hands of the people belonging to the other community.

Taslima Nasreen combines both fancy and reality to weave the novel which is more or less precise painting of the world at large with pictures of human beings who live to suffer under the sun. It may also be noted that in this novel the author pursues the theme of male-female encounter, which assumes a rare depth and validity. It may be concisely summed up as man-woman relationship in the context of marital and extra marital relationships. In the marriage of Nilanjana and Kishnlal we find the disharmony between two individuals of different tastes and feelings as in the family of Sunilda and his wife. Chaitali, Benoir and his wife tells about a woman who is willing to give her husband to another woman for the sake of love. Monique Mathew, the French citizen turned Indian, after marrying an Indian, travels from France to India in the hope of living with her loving husband forever. But destiny decides differently. Though she is a lovely and vigorous person and has married a Bengali much younger than her she gets a divorce. In the relationship between Nilanjana's mother Molina and Anirban, Destiny snatches Molina away from Anirban. Nilanjana's mother has been neglected for long and there is no treatment for her disease though her father Anirban is a doctor. In Nilanjana's opinion whatever treatment Anirban might have given to his wife was a pretence to she was getting treated by doctors.

Danielle, a French citizen, has a very bitter childhood to recall. Her father had raped her; she has suffered bitterly many times because of the sexual vulgarity of the people around and, ultimately, she turns into a homosexual. Nila's relationship with Sushanta, the high caste Brahmin of Calcutta, exposes the infidelity of a love that fails before marriage and also the pre-marital illegitimate sexual life of an Indian girl on Indian soil. The girl marries Kishanlal with thousands of hopes and dreams: "Nila had her share of dreams about hard life sustained only on love. Perhaps every Bengali was born with that desire"

On her first trip to Paris, Nila meets the Dutch lady Gabriella; she is forty three and has been buying fabric from India and taking it back to sell in her country. She makes a good profit in her trade of selling plate, jewellery, incense etc. In the Western culture the woman takes her relation ship with a man perhaps in a very light way and there is nobody to talk about her. But, in Calcutta, if a woman flirts with a man her life is considered to be doomed and there will be no man to marry her and that is why a man like Kishanlal has had to travel from France to marry the girl Nila when Sushanta jilted her. On her second trip to Paris,

on board the flight, Nila meets Benoir Dupont, who is two years younger than her. Benoir can sense that Nila is like a reckless refugee. He is very cautious about his every move towards this newfound comfort. In Nila's Indian tradition, sex is admissible only in the context of love and affection. But, in Benoir's culture, one can have sex with someone without loving her, depending on the circumstances. Benoir has just happened in Nila's life. After studying all these relationships one can simply say that these are not relationships. According to the Indian tradition, a relationship is deemed to last for ever and to keep the concerned people happy, while encounters, where a man and a woman meet each other and find themselves indulging in certain actions (sexual) end only in unhappiness, regret and reproach, with no possibility of a compromise and happy solution. Because Nasreen's women characters are all dominated by emotions, they are not ready to tune themselves to the domestic sphere ruled by man. Nasreen wants to show that her women characters have liberated themselves from their subordinate status. Baker Jean Miller, in Towards a New Psychology of Women, says: Most women do have a much greater sense of the emotional components of all human activity than most men. This is, in part, a result of their training as subordinates; for any one in a subordinated position must learn to be attuned to the vicissitudes of mood, pleasure and displeasure of the dominant group.

Nila's decision to break away from the mismatched marriage and her refusal to accept the life offered by Benoir and her self discovery as an individual reveals that a female self can discover as an individual if it really wills so. Nasreen introduces Nila as an apostle of the liberation movement, advocating freedom from the tradition bound Indian woman. Nasreen generalizes her opinion and makes the reading public aware that the liberation of women should start from one's own mind. It is a universal fact that the tradition and custom of any nation demands marriage as the legitimate institution to organize a family, the core part of which is centralized in a man and his wife. Love and affection seem to be the password for emotional attachment and adjustment for a happy married life. A couple of two different temperaments, if united in marriage, find it a difficult relationship wherein the mutual adjustments and tolerance towards each other get dissolved in an atmosphere of bleak disheartedness. Though there is much talk about woman's liberation it is a truth that society expects a woman to make compromises to keep the family intact and happy. Meena Shirwadkar, in Image of Woman in the Indo-Anglian Novel, says: "Marriage is an obligation for womanhood but it makes a demand on woman .She is expected to go through a long process of learning what she has to learn in order to adapt herself to her new environment"

The institution of marriage, with all it expectations, falls heavily on a woman. However, when it becomes a battlefield between two egoistic individuals who are not ready for compromise, it proves that the fittest can survive; the strategy of survival varies from woman to woman; when she succumbs to the internal pressure of her own self and the external pressure from the society she either commits suicide or loses her identity. The brave one does not want to make a compromise and comes out of the shackles of the union. Nasreen's protagonist Nila proves a brave character and she wants to retain her individuality against the destructive forces that threaten her identity as an individual and as a woman since marriage subjugates her. Through the character of Nila, Nasreen portrays the inner struggle of an artist to express her feminine urge for self-expression. Even a causal reading of the novel makes one conscious that Nasreen is not only writing about her female protagonist Nila, who is a victim of the institution of marriage and identity crisis, but through Nila, also about other women who are subjugated and enslaved. Kishan never understands the identity of Nila. Women have faced identity crisis, but the crisis seems to occur mostly because of the control men exercise over women. A crisis in one's identity leads to a heightened sense of alienation. Nila leaves Kishan's home. Nasreen generalizes Nila's experiences as a subjugated woman and the subsequent

trauma she undergoes and her successful exit as an individual to raise consciousness among women in general. But in Consciousness Raising, the point of sharing information about personal life and personal experience was to connect these into something that could transcend the personal. A crucial function of CR was to connect the personal with the political. Once shared in a small group with other women, individual pain and suffering appeared in a different light.

Danielle and her lesbianism represent western freedom, which means she is emancipated, free from all restrictions, social or otherwise, but runs the risk of moral corruption and hence is negatively emancipated. The society at large is still ignorant of such vulgar and gruesome assaults on women though it is a land of "equality", but she revolts against these atrocities by transforming herself into a lesbian to get a female identity To sum up, in French Lover the story revolves not only round the Indian bride how becomes a liberated woman afterwards, but also on the less fortunate women who are considered objects of sex and gratification as many women in the developing countries. The indiscriminate sexual subjugation under different men and the frustration and the self pity at the inability of her own self to avert such pathetic situations and at the selfish nature of the men in her sexual encounters, the betrayal of her beloved husband, friend and lover enlighten Nila, the innocent and ignorant dreamy bride into a hardcore feminist. Nasreen's strength as an analytical writer is revealed as she speaks sometimes through the characters within the frame and many times like an objective chorus .She wails from the periphery of the entire string of incidents. The author makes her characters live and suffer at various places of the world, kindling the imagination of the sensible readers to recognize that the plight of women is the same throughout the world. Her characters fly from East to West and West to East, with the hope of enjoying bliss through marriage, which is not to be. Almost all the women characters suffer sexual atrocity. It may be not necessarily from unknown men but the men of their own family and men who happened to be their friends. Pathetically enough, sex does not distinguish a daughter or a friend, Nasreen generalizes the plight of women by introducing various women characters in parallel situations where in the experience of one woman happens to be that of other women. Ultimately the culmination becomes the liberation or emancipation of women from men. This may be like Nilanjana leaving her husband to live with her friend or like Danielle leaving her father to live alone in the company of friends of her own. The heroine removes herself from her family and her husband because she feels she has an identity of her own that cannot be related to anybody else.

REFERENCES

BOOKS

1. Bishoyi, Deepak. Dimensions of Gender Problem. (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House. 2007). 74. Print
2. Nasreen, Taslima.Shodh. (New Delhi: Shrishti Publishers and Distributers. 2003).73. Print.
3. Shah, Niroj. Women and Violence. (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. 1989). Print
4. Coomaraswamy, Radhika. Violence Against Women. (Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publishers. 2002). 29. Print
5. Nasreen, Taslima.Shodh. (New Delhi: Shrishti Publishers and Distributers. 2003.)201. Print
6. Nasreen, Taslima.Shodh. (New Delhi: Shrishti Publishers and Distributers. 2003.)201. Print
7. Sinha, Dr Archana. "Conceptual Study of Violence Against Women-The Sociological Dimension", Women and Violence. (New Delhi: Radha Krishna. 1978.) 43. Print
8. Nasreen, Taslima. French Lover: A Novel. Trans. Sreejata Guha. New Delhi: Penguin, 2002.
9. Shirwadkhar, Meena. Image of Woman in Indo Anglian Novel. New Delhi: Sterling, 1979.

Taslima Nasreen as an Iconic Feminist

Dr.K.K.Sunalini

Assoc.Prof.of.English

K.L.University

Taslima Nasreen is a Bengali, Bangladeshi author, feminist human rights activist and secular humanist. Born in the middle class Muslim family in North of Bangladesh in 1962, she received liberal education. At the age of 23 she became a doctor and started working in the poorer parts of her country. She wrote extensively for periodicals when she came to the West's attention. She has won many awards including Ananda Puraskar, the Sakharov prize for freedom of thought from the European Parliament, the Kurt Tuckholsky award from Swedish PEN: a human rights prize from the French government , and a humanist Award from International Humanist and Ethical Union. After living in exile for 18 years, Taslima Nasreen made a public appearance in Delhi. In an interview with The Hindu she said:

> I want to feel safe in India. I get sympathy, solidarity and love from the people who believe in freedom of expression and women's rights […] sometimes I feel lonely in the fight for freedom of expression in the Indian subcontinent. I have no right to live in Bangladesh and West Bengal, the lands where fellow Bengalis live. I am not only banished from those lands, I am also black listed" (The Hindu, Aug 31, 2012).

Taslima Nasreen's cancellation of the release of her latest book *Nirbasan* at the Kolkata Book Fair proved that the controversy has become her second nature. Her writings focus on womens' rights and also on the Islamic fundamentalists. She has been struggling for her right to freedom of expression. She expresses her feelings of alienness to Bengal and Bangladesh in an interview given to The Hindu "I want the government not to violate freedom of expression"(The Hindu, Feb

Educational Administration: Theory and Practice
2023, 29(4), 1528-1530
ISSN: 2148-2403
https://kuey.net/

Research Article

An Analysis On Portrayal Of Relationship Intimacy In Taslima Nasrin's French Lover

Napolean Joseph[1*], Dr. K. N. Sharmila[2]

[1*]Ph.D., Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram.
Email: napolean14joseph@gmail.com 8608601540
[2]Research Supervisor, Department of English, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram.
Email: shermilanatarajan@gmail.com 9942315666

Citation: Napolean Joseph, (2023) An Analysis On Portrayal Of Relationship Intimacy In Taslima Nasrin's French Lover, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 29(4),* 1528-1530
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v29i4.6474

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Man is the unifying term for both male and female. Man should not be alone 'And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.' – Genesis 2:18. Versatile personalities, great thinkers, even normal people say an individual should not be alone. Someone like friend, husband, wife or any relative should accompany him or her in the journey of life. It is up to the individual to choose the time and the person when he or she should be accompanied. This saying doesn't mean that relationship, private relationship, marital relationship should be with the same gender. Certain relationship should be avoided and should not be developed. The paper focus on bisexual and lesbian relationships are happening just for the sake of ecstasy, like an addiction. Deep thoughts will be transformed in to action, says Dr.A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, our thoughts in a relationship will evolve it even will get broken after sometime. Intimacy grows in a relationship and so people stay and stand for each other in their difficult situations. Here in Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover*, the relationship of married couple *Nilanjana Mandal* (*Nila*) and her husband Kishanlal; *Nila* and her relationship with French girlfriends Danielle and *Nila's* extra marital relationship with a French man Benoir is analysed under the Queer concept.

Keywords: bisexual, lesbian, marriage, society, relationships.

Intimacy is defined as "feeling understood, validated, cared for, and closely connected with another person [or with God]" (Reis & Shaver, 1988, p. 385). Merriam Webster defines Intimacy as 'something of a personal or private nature'. Feeling safe when expressing vulnerability (Cordova & Scott, 2001) and during times of conflict (Dorian & Cordova, 2004) are important components of intimacy. It is well said that the individual should be accompanied at all their circumstance to avoid loneliness. A person will be haunted by infinity thoughts if they are alone. Dreams transforms into thoughts, thoughts results into action, says Dr.A.P.J. Kalam. (Interview, Facebook) Nilanjana Mandal (Nila) here haunted by such kind of thoughts and feelings after she encountered insecurity and a guest feeling with her husband. "Nila felt like a guest in Kishanlal's home" (Nasrin, 13). Home the word refers for the place filled with feelings and emotions. It is the home for Kishanlal but not for Nila. Nila hates Kishanlal (Kishan), even their friends push her towards him she did not like him. "Kishan looked at Nila with half closed eyes and said, 'Come closer. You're my wife and you are sitting so far away.' Everyone almost pushed Nila towards Kishan" (Nasrin, 18). When people did not like their companions, they try to move away from them and they will move away. Nila did not like Kishan because of his selfishness. Kishan always cares for him and he wanted to be good only in front of other people but not with Nila. When others push Nila to join with Kishan, people would have thought that Nila is adamant and a girl should not be so. She is not suitable for Kishan but none of them had their point from the side of Nila. What made her to do so? Why she behaves differently? Everywhere people try to convince only the female gender because she is the one who could be easily convinced. Though being convinced is to be a great quality people look this in a negative aspect when it comes to a girl.

Nila could not be intimate with Kishan and she could not bear up the things for long time, she broke off the relationship with Kishan and flew away and came back because she doesn't want to be the reason for the

Copyright © 2023 by Author/s and Licensed by Kuey. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

separation between them. She irritates him with her acts and she moves away after his command over her. " 'My prestige and honour, all are gone.' Kishan heaved a huge sigh." (Nasrin, 73)
"Nila saw the young man kissing the woman and stroking her back lovingly. The two bodies were entwined. Nila wanted to be kissed like that;" (Nasrin, 67) Nila wanted to be in a intimate relationship. She could manage herself for that relationship but she doesn't want to lose her 'self' to that man Kishan. She thrown away her desire for not accepting her as a Girl. She longed for the intimacy. She longed for a relationship. She longed for a care. She longed for a love.

Danielle her French girlfriend who is working with her in packing computer and its accessories. Nila shared all her with Danielle. She dined with her at many hotels, Nila knew Danielle friends, once Nila invited Danielle and Natalie to her room for Bengali food. They come to know the life style of Nila. Danielle offered Nila a dinner and she accused Nila for not thanking her for pouring wine while Nila justifies, in India, people never offer thanks between friends. Danielle prompted Nila, the waiter poured water to you, you didn't thank him, is he your friend? Nila could not understand why she speaking like this but she come to know about Danielle through these kinds of conversation. She lacked these with Kishan, if they had so, she would not have separated from him. Intimacy develops between the couple or between anybody only by understanding them. Nila and Danielle stayed together they were very open to each other even then Nila could not found that Danielle is a homosexual and Danielle has developing a deep desire to be intimate with Nila. Once Nila encountered Danielle's behaviour with her Nila stopped her Danielle was surprised and laughing at Nila for not finding her true side. They had seen people at roads kissing each other. Nila witness the freedom the people have; Danielle explains the homosexuality's to Nila everyone has freedom to do what they wish. Even then Nila couldn't find her at that time that she is a homosexual. "Danielle's fingers climbed her arms and reached her scalp via her neck. Nila always dozed off if someone stroked her head. Molina used to do it often and Nila would fall asleep. In this faraway land Danielle was like mother to her." (Nasrin, 97-98) Nila thought Danielle could be her mother her but Danielle wanted to have another kind relationship with her. People could not find what actually other person wanted to do with them. This makes relationship discrimination among the relationship. Danielle wanted to have lesbian relationship with Nila whereas Nila doesn't like that and don't wanted to be in such relationship but she accepts it and maintained the lesbian relation with Danielle for short period of time.
" 'Why? Don't you want it too?' Danielle was surprised.
'Want what?'
'Sex.'
'What?'
'I thought you wanted it too.'
'How did you think that?'
Danielle said, 'You held my hands in the street.'
'So?'
'So I thought you liked me.'. . .
. . . Nila was still confused. Before her eyes the room began to spin, it flew in the air, the bed flew in the air. When she came back to it Danielle's rapacious tongue licked her for the rest of the night. Nila lay there, speechess, breathless." (Nasrin, 99)

Though Nila didn't like the Danielle's act she accepted it and continued. "Danielle pleaded, 'Nila, I love you. Please share your feelings with me.' " (Nasrin, 116) She commits the same while Nila had gone for India for her Mother's death. What is the need of such act when one's mother funeral is being held? People use to smoke to come of their stress. They do this to come of their anxiety. Like so Nila depends on Danielle to come of the anxiety and Danielle uses the opportunity. Nila wanted to be intimate with Danielle but this lesbian relationship didn't give her intimacy rather an addiction in pleasurable relationship.

Nila longing for her desired life and relationship. She finds Benoir Dupont (Benoir) whom she meets while departing from India to France to fill her dreams. He had a good chat with her in plane and taken her with him to meet out her needs. "Nila looked into Benoir's blue eyes. He was far better looking that any of the handsome men she had ever fantasized about." (Nasrin, 168) Nila, finds Benoir after Kishan and Danielle. She lived with him even he introduced him to her as married. When they meet very first at Benoir's flat " Benoir spoke in an intimate voice, 'Drink me up, Nila, drink me.' " (Nasrin, 170) The intimacy which Nila longs started to grown here. The had relationship, Nila stayed with him, Benoir satisfied her feelings which she longed for. She lost herself in him. They were romantic and he is not like Kishan and Danielle. They compelled her to be in the relationship but he never. He crested the feeling in her and she enjoyed the relationship she felt the intimacy in him. She was very my transparent with him. He takes care of her in all the ways. She like him the more. Once Nila come to know about the continuity of relationship between Benoir and her wife she felt bad. She could not console herself and no body was there to console her. She asked him to leave them (wife and daughter) to accompany her. Benoir was so strong at her daughter, when Nila knew this her heart broke and her intimacy stops there. She come to know that no body is intimate in the world to anybody. People comes in life for a reason for a period of time and they leave at a point when it accomplishes. Nila in *French Lover* is denoted as bisexual but she is not a heterosexual, lesbian, asexual, intersexual even bisexual. She wanted her feelings to

be respected and she to be cared. She just wanted to be in a good relationship that need not to be in any specific way. She wanted to speak out what she wants to speak for that she doesn't need any specific relation. Kishan who is against her by framing certain norms for female and Danielle she wanted her to oblige her, though Danielle stands for Nila in different situations. In the case of Benoir, when Nila comes to know that there is someone more important than her to him, she withdrawn herself from him and starts to live alone after some suicidal attempts and punishing her body. Nasrin ends ups this novel open ended and made Nila to continues this till she finds a person for her to share her feelings as the world people goes around one to another to share their emotions and feelings in the concept if intimacy. People rather conclude they can stand for themselves so that the intimacy could recklessly grow with others to understand others in better way.

Works cited

1. Nasrin, Taslima. *French Lover*. Trans. Sreejata Guha. New Delhi: Penguin Books. 2002.
2. Reis HT, Shaver P. Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In: Duck S, editor. *Handbook of Personal Relationships*. Chichester, England: Wiley; 1988. pp. 367–389.
3. Cordova J, Scott R. Intimacy: A behavioral interpretation. *The Behavior Analyst*. 2001;24(1):75–86.
4. Dorian M, Cordova J. Coding intimacy in couples' interactions. In: Kerig P, Baucom D, editors. *Couple Observational Coding Systems*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 2004. pp. 243–256.
5. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intimacy
6. https://www.facebook.com/kalamcentre/videos/dream-dream-dream-dreams-transform-into-thoughts-and-thoughts-result-in-actionka/3282846771953671/

12,2012). It is strange to know that *Nirbasan* was not stopped from release by fundamentalists but by the authorities. Actually the attacking of the fundamentalists started with *Dwikhandito*. She strongly feels that "[…]had they not banned the book, the questions of attacks on me, setting price on my head, demands for my deportation and cancellation of my book launch would not have risen" (The Hindu).

Taslima has authored six novels, eight collections of poetry and four volumes of essays. Her books and columns have been censored by the publishers and editors. Ninety percent of the publishers failed to pay her royalty. *Amar Meyebela, Utal Hawa* and *Ka* are her three volumes of autobiography. The first two volumes have been banned by the Dhaka court due to the defamation suit filed by an established Bengali poet and novelist, Syed Shamsal Haq. It was he who given security in his house when she was attacked by mullahs for her courageous criticism of the Quran and Islamic practices. *Dwikhandito* (2002), the same book with added chapters was also banned by Kolkata High Court. It is Hasmat Jalal who filed a defamation suit of rupees eleven crores. The book is about the memory of Bangladesh in the 1980s when military threw out secularism in the country. Since some Indians claim that the book hurted their sentiments, she withdrew controversial lines from the book.

In 1994 she went to the West because of the *Fatwa* imposed by Muslim religious leaders. They demanded Taslima to be executed which resulted in her arrest on the charge of blasphemy. This was because of the publication of her book *Lajja* (*Shame*) in 1993. "I am sure you have become tired of being called 'the female Salman Rushdie' . . . but please know that there are many people in many countries working to . . . defend you against those who would cheerfully see you dead. . . . In the West, there are too many eloquent apologists working to convince people of the fiction that women are not discriminated against in Muslim countries or that, if they are, it has nothing to do with religion (Excerpt from an open letter from Salman Rushdie to Taslima Nasrin)

In *Dwikhandito,* she described her relationships with senior writers and journalists. Taslima, explained in her reply that the incidents in the book are part of her life. In B.B.C interview she said that she had tried to see them as human beings and defended herself by asking why should she not write about those important personalities. She further added that it was a story of her life and what ever had

happened in her life she tried to narrate faithfully and this makes it difficult for some people to receive the hard realities of a woman's exploitation.

Several intellectuals commented *Ka* as a book written with the business aspect in mind. They described the book as autobiographical Kamasutra. Poets and writers of Kolkata and Dhaka said that she had written a ' fictious fantasy' about sexual encounters. She wrote how a freedom-seeking-woman, even educated like her, would struggle in every step of her life. She also portrayed the sufferings of all the women.

Taslima strongly feels that her fight is highly important because the fundamentalists want to put everybody in their straightjacket frame work and dictate what an individual should eat, wear and live. She is against the fundamentalism because they deny others the right to express their views freely, and cannot tolerate anything which they perceive as going against their faith. She makes a statement "I do not agree that the conflict is simply between two religions – Christianity and Islam or Hinduism and Islam or Judaism and. There are fundamentalists in every religious community (The Hindu, Aug31, 2012). Taslima explored the horrible lives of many women of the country. She criticized the religion because it gave women a very marginal role in the society. Even if her husband tortures her, she has no right to say anything. This is also the part of the religious teaching. Women are widely discouraged to go to school. It is widely understood that they are born to cook and bear children. A man can marry up to four women, but a woman does not even have the right to choose her own husband. The family would decide her marital fate. Taslima's life is a live example of male chauvinism. She married three times and got divorced because those men wanted to control her. She wanted to do things on her own but none of them allowed her to do so. Syed Shamsul Haq, her editor husband did not show much interest in publishing her works. He started giving her advice on what to write and what not to write. After divorcing him, when she was living in the apartment, her father and brother visited her. She was surprised at their visit. They neither ate dinner nor went to sleep. They spent the whole night sitting in chairs. She did not know what the matter was with them. Next day morning when she was about to go to work, her father stopped her and said she need not go to the hospital. When she replied that the patients would be waiting for her, her father immediately pushed her down to the floor and kicked her in the stomach. While she managed to stand up, she got

another push and a kick in the back. She fell on the refrigerator and cut her lips. Her brother threw a tabloid on her face. Taslima's physical abuse by her own father and brother is only due to her writings which criticized the Islamic fundamentalists and her three marriages which made them to hurt their prestige. She was forced to go to Maymonshigh and was locked in a room, where she was given food and a portable commode to respond to the nature calls. One morning when her mother brought her breakfast in, there was a sudden noise in the kitchen. Her mother ran to the kitchen forgetting to lock the room. Taslima got a chance to run out of the house. She took a detour to go to the Dhaka city. She did not know what to do and where to go. Her father gave up the apartment she rented, and her furniture was taken to Maymonshigh. She hardly found place to sleep. An editor gave her shelter and later married him. She did not actually wanted to marry him but she had no where to stay. Later on it was this editor who used to come home late in a drunken form and beat her up. Once he pushed her out of the door and locked it from inside. Taslima thought that it was enough. She decided once for all not to stay with him anymore. Besides her life, in this biographical novel, she discussed the women's problems in the society, the political unrest and the religious suppression. The socio economic situation and the uprising of the Muslim fundamentalism were also been illustrated. She wrote that religion is such a destroyer, even when it is not believed; the people are bounded by it. It is almost like a cancer that has no medicine. The government seized her passport and asked to get the government's approval if she had to publish anything. The authority told that every government employee had to go through the censorship. So she quit the hospital job and became a full time writer. Very soon Mullahs declared 50000taka for beheading her. They found fault with her for writing against Muhammad and Koran. There were rallies against her in every city demanding her death sentence. She was continuously being threatened over the phone. She wrote that she was staying at home holding her life in hand. The International Writers Groups, PEN and the Amnesty International kept on pressurizing the government for her safety. Finally her passport was given back to her and she was thrown out to Europe in 1994. She stayed in the U.S where she pursued a fellowship at Harward on the possibility of secularism in the Islamic countries. She illustrated the darkness of the society.

In her essay 'Keeping the Meat Safe'Taslima reminds the tradition of wearing burqa as meat safe. She learnt from her mother that wearing burqa is keeping the meat safe and also obeying *Allah*. She had many doubts about burqa and asked many questions like if her mother felt breathless whether she was angry and throwing it off. At the age of sixteen Taslima threw out the burqa when she was presented. In her essay "Let's think about the burqa"she says that the women of aristocratic Assyrian families used purdah. Ordinary women and prostitutes were not allowed purdah. In the middle ages, even Anglo- Saxon women used to cover their hair and chin and hide their faces behind a cloth or similar object. She makes it clear that this purdah was not religious. The religious purdah was used by catholic nuns and Mormons. For Muslim women, such religious purdah was not limited to specific rituals but mandatory for their daily life. She finds fault with Shabana Azmi's statement that Koran does not say anything about burqa and quoted the following lines from Quran:

> Tell the faithful women that they must keep their gaze focused below on the ground and cover their beauty and their jewellery on display.They must hide their breasts behind a purdah. They must not exhibit their beauty to anybody except their husbands,brothers, nephews, women folk, servants, eunuch employees and children. They must not move legs briskly while walking because then much of their bodies can get exposed (Sura Al Noor 24:31).Oh nabi, please tell your wives and daughters and faithful women to wear a covering dress on their bodies. That would be good. Then nobody can recognize them and harass them. Allah is merciful and kind(Sra Al Hijaab 33:59).

Taslima criticizes the lines 33 and 59 of Bukhari Hadis Book 026 No.5397. She questions why did Allah not start the purdah for men? Allah does not treat men and women as equals. Else there would be purdah for both! Men are higher than women. So women have to be made walking prisons and men can remain free birds. Taslima questions why are women covered. It is only because they are sex objects. Because when men see them, they are roused. Why should women have to

be penalized for man's sexual problems? Even women has sexual urges. But men are not covered for that. In no religion formulated by men or women considered to have a separate existence, or as human beings having desires and opinions separate from men's. The purdah rules not only humiliate women but men too. She questions Shabana and her supporters who argue that the Quran says nothing about purdah. Taslima argues, if the Quran advises women to use purdah, should they do so. She said that she would personally say no. Irrespective of which book says, which person advises, whoever commands, women should not have purdah, no veil, no chador, no hijab, no burqa, no head scarf. According to her, women should not use any of the above mentioned things because all these are instruments of disrespect. To her, these are symbols of women's oppression. Through them, women are told that they are but the property of men. Objects for their use. She opines that these coverings are used to keep women passive and submissive. Women are to wear them so that they cannot exist with their self-respect, honor, confidence, separate identity. Finally Taslima says that covering a women's head means, covering her brain and ensuring that it does not work. If women's brains worked properly, they would have long ago thrown off these veils and burqas imposed on them by a religious and patriarchal regime. She courageously passes on the message to Islamic women to protest against this discrimination. They should proclaim a war against the wrongs and ill- treatment meted out to them for hundreds of years. They should snatch the freedom and rights from men. She asks them to burn their burqas. Political parties like BJP supported the right to freedom of expression where as CPM which claims to uphold secular values wants to keep her off Kolkata. Support to Taslima could lead to a loss of Muslim votes in West Bengal. There is every reason for all secular minded people to support Taslima's plea for citizenship. Administration should protect her rights as a human being and a professional writer. Khushwant Singh, Arundati Roy, Leela Seth, Kuldeep Nayyar, Vijay Tendulkar, Arun Roy, Shyam Benagal, Girish Karnad, Saeed Naqui, Y.P. Chibber have supported for the stay of Tasleema in India. They upheld her right to speak forthrightly on any subject including the burqa and acknowledged it as her fundamental right.

Taslima Nasreen has withdrawn controversial lines in her autobiographical book *Dwikhandito* just two days after the centre said it would continue to shelter the exiled author but she had to refrain from hurting religious sentiments. She said

that she was withdrawing the controversial lines from her book *Dwikhandito*. The book was written in 2002 based on her memories of Bangladesh in the 1980s during which the secularism was removed from the Bangladesh constitution. As she said that she valued secularism she wanted secularism to remain in the Bangladesh. When the west Bengal government banned the third volume of her autobiography *Dwikhandito,* it was not because Muslims were angry with the book, No Muslim had demanded the ban. The government's argument was that something might happen. The concerned scholars of South Asia condemned the attacks on Bangladesh and Indian governments to safeguard Taslima's rights to dignity and freedom of speech to ensure that she does not become a pawn in an ugly stand- off between Hindu and Muslim chauvinist forces. There are so many people from Cambridge University who supported her. There was even candle light support from more than 100 people to express dissatisfaction over the hasty transportation of Taslima Nasreen from West Bengal. The protesters of the vigil felt that freedom of expression should be irrespective of caste, gender or religion. To express himself or herself, is the basis of a democratic society. When Taslima based her writings on Islam and Prophet Mohammad, the BJP has sprung to her defence. They were seeking to reinforce their anti-Muslim stance and consequently consolidate the Hindu vote bank. In an interview to *Out Look* magazine she said that she was no religious expert but cannot tolerate inhumanity in the name of religion. In an interview to Sheela Reddy in Rajasthan Tasleema said that she wrote about women's rights, and also against the fundamentalists' women's rights, and also against the women's rights and fundamentalism cannot go together. It is pity that she started coming to West Bengal as a tourist every year till 2004. She loves to be in Kolkata. Though she was better-off at abroad, she considers herself as outsider there. She likes to stay in India- a Bengali, a Rajasthani, a Malayali and everyone else. She says that her writing has become political as the stuff in the shops of Kolkata were burnt up even without reading them.

When asked whether she was against Islam she replied that women suffer because of religious laws as well as customs and cultural traditions. Her intention is not to hurt anybody's feelings. Religious or otherwise but to stand up for human rights and secular humanism as she strongly believed in democracy and freedom of expression. Most of her books are about women and women's rights. In few pages she commented on religious laws and traditions. When human rights are violated in

the name of religion, she had to write about religion. She says that religion is not her subject and she is not a religious expert. It is a matter of displeasure to her for having been branded as anti-Islam. She could not imagine that what happened in Bangladesh happened in secular democratic India. If it happened in Saudi Arabia or Iran it would be common but not in India. She set up a secular organization for Muslims in Kolkata and educated them against fundamentalism.

She talks to The Hindu interview, February 12, 2012 about feminism in South Asia which is not very strong. After all women did not really fight for the rights they have in India. She feels that there are issues regarding women's atrocities which have to be viewed more seriously:

> They did not have to fight for voting rights like their counterparts in the West. It was men who fought for women, to educate them to ban Sati, to stop child marriage, to get widows remarried and so on. She says that India is the most dangerous place for women; she cites, female foeticide or femicide, sex trafficking, sexual slavery, domestic violence, dowry, murder, bride burning are increasing. It is actually war against women(The Hindu)

Lajja (*Shame)* is a documentary novel about the precarious existence of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh in the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, India by Hindu fundamentalists on December 6, 1992. The Muslim mobs in Bangladesh took their revenge on the Hindu minority. The book was banned in 1993 on charges of disturbing communal harmony. Bangladeshi government filed a criminal case against her in 1994. On one occasion in Bangladesh, at the National book fair, the fundamentalists attacked her physically, knocked to the ground and cloths torn. However several secular intellectuals wrote in her defense, They literally saved her life. She also had support from many Muslims in the countries who wrote many articles supporting her in their journals. Iranian feminists came to her defense. Taslima prefers to talk directly and truthfully without hiding anything. She does not believe in tactics. She is not a diplomat or a politician. She says whatever she believes in. She has documented

statistical exactitude the communal atrocities of Muslims against Hindus of Bangladesh.

The novel is all is about a family that faced a violent time in 1992 when some Hindus spread across Bangladesh. The author wrote about the incidents that happened during this time. Abduction and rapes of Hindu women and more. There were more than 200 temples which were said to be destroyed and more than 1000 Hindus were attacked and rendered homeless. The novel reflects Taslima's protest of the event. She tells the tale of a fictional family that happened during the period of violence. She says that she does not think it suggests that Hindus are good and Muslims are bad in any way. She thinks that the book explored the effect of violence and oppression on the psychology and relationships of people. The oppression seems to contaminate both sides. She has provided many factual accounts of discretion and destruction of the Hindu minority in her book. The response to this book has been extreme. Islamic fundamentalists offered a large cash award for her beheading after the book was released. Readers are moved by her honesty, intense intelligence and courage. The book will show the reader to take another look at themselves and the society they live in. It will show the reader how it feels to be on the receiving end of all abuses and injustices in the world. The book is the universal story of persecution of minorities all over the world. She feels that it should be a mandatory reading for all young people. It deals with genocide and describes the genocide of a minority eliminating their existence completely. Taslima Nasreen expresses her views regarding the film making of her novels and also her life. She says that no film maker in West Bengal is allowed to make a film based on her novel or on her cat's life. She says, "I will never be silenced. I will continue my fight for justice and equality until my death" (The Hindu, Aug 31, 2012).

References:

From Salman Rushdie to Taslima Nasrin: A Letter of Support Free Inquiry, *Vol. 19, No. 1*

www.searchtruth.com/**hadith**_books.php

www.dar-us-salam.com/TheNoble**Quran**/index.html

Nasreen Taslima “Let's Think Again About The Burqa” taslimanasrin.com/OPINION.pdf

… “Keeping the Meat Safe” egregores.blogspot.com/.../keeping-meat-safe-**taslima-nasreen**-on.ht...

View publication stats

Check for updates

SOUTH ASIA
RESEARCH
www.sagepublications.com
DOI: 10.1177/0262728016638716
Vol. 36(2): 167–185

Copyright © 2016
SAGE Publications
Los Angeles,
London,
New Delhi,
Singapore,
Washington DC
and Melbourne

NASRIN GONE GLOBAL: A CRITIQUE OF TASLIMA NASRIN'S CRITICISM OF ISLAM AND HER FEMINIST STRATEGY

Md Mahmudul Hasan
International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ABSTRACT Taslima Nasrin's writings, which are extremely critical of Islam, have sparked controversy over the contents of her feminist work and strategy. Although many dismiss these writings as an anti-Islamic provocation, her ideas are well-received in the West, where she is celebrated as a feminist rebel who defies the supposedly suffocating Bangladeshi Islamic patriarchy. Unlike earlier Islamic feminists, especially Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, who re-examined Islamic teachings in the light of locally prevalent gender discrimination, Nasrin directs her attacks against religion itself, putting almost the entire blame of gender injustice on it. In light of Rokeya's work and strategy, and current struggles in Bangladesh to fine-tune the nation's vision, the present article critically analyses Nasrin's overly negative views of Islam and assesses the validity and efficacy of her feminist approach in Bangladesh society.

KEYWORDS: *Bangla literature, Bangladesh, feminism, Islam and gender, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, South Asian literature, Taslima Nasrin*

Introduction

Feminist writing in what is now Bangladesh took off with Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932),[1] who arguably foregrounded her ideas in Islamic normativity and indigenous culture and is relatively little known globally (Hasan, 2012b). About 100 years after her, however, Taslima Nasrin,[2] born in 1962, notably produced a number of works that are very critical of Islam, particularly *Amar Meyebela* (Nasrin, 1999), *Utal Hawa* (Nasrin, 2002) and *Ka* (Nasrin, 2003b). The aggressive style of this writing has increased publicity for the author but has also generated controversy over the contents of her feminist work and strategy.

Feminist writers in Muslim societies are sharply divided into two diametrically opposed groups. One highlights the emancipatory aspects of Islam and looks for gender egalitarianism in them. The other regards Islam as inherently gender oppressive, castigates it and prefers a western, secular feminist framework to ameliorate women's

condition.[3] Taslima Nasrin clearly belongs to the second group, as strident criticism of Islam pervades her entire oeuvre and is inseparable from her feminist arguments. Hasan (2012a: 60–2) and Nash (2012: 3) argue that, while treatment of women in other world religions and cultures is seen as discriminatory, exploitative and marked by prevailing socio-cultural malpractices, Islam is generally singled out for misogynistic charges. Accordingly, following the classical orientalist discourse's tendency, writers like Nasrin draw 'heavily on earlier tropes of Orientalism' (Nash, 2012: 50) in their invectives against Islam. It seems to resonate with 'progressive' feminist neo-orientalist doctrines and negative constructions of Muslims. These have been reinforced by the end of the Cold War and the West's renewed conflict with the Islamic world since the 1990s, marking an intensified Islamophobic milieu and popular discourse. Nasrin's emergence in the same period may not be a simple coincidence. It may point towards the participation of the recoded and reterritorialised 'native-informant-as-woman-of-the-South' (Spivak, 1999: 13) in 'the *Kulturkampf* against Islam' which, as Nash (2012: 4) puts it, 'disrupts the normal postcolonial periphery v metropolitan West battle-lines'. Nash (2012: 64) poignantly describes such writers:

> Moving through the roles of communal victim to liberated individuals and tapping into the western discourses of feminism and the individual's right to freedom, a handful of Third World women escapees have accumulated the necessary symbolic capital to become iconic native converts to western liberalism … eagerly promoted by both the western publishing industry and the electronic and print media.

Embracing a western secular ethos and denigrating and rejecting their religious and cultural base, writers who attack Islam from inside thus become 'alien to the Third World view of itself' (Malak, 1989: 184) and complicit in the West's battle against Islam. In return, they receive disproportionate recognition in the dominant media.

Based on this theoretical premise, the present study investigates and contextualises Nasrin's exceedingly disparaging remarks—which she presumably makes in the service of feminism—about Islam, God, the Prophet Muhammad and the faithful. The article first provides a brief overview of earlier feminist writing in Bangladesh and then addresses the debate over the viability of Nasrin's work, with a view to assessing its relevance to and usefulness for the feminist movement in Bangladesh.

Contextualising Nasrin in the Feminist Writing in Muslim Bengal

Although there had been some earlier writers like Taherunnessa,[4] Nawab Faizunnesa (1834–1903)[5] and Karimunnessa (1855–1926),[6] feminist writings in Muslim Bengal took off with Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932). Calcutta was the centre of Rokeya's literary, educational and political activism, but since she was born in what is now Bangladesh, she is regarded as a feminist iconic figure in Bangladesh rather than in India and '[a]ll subsequent feminist writers and literary practitioners of the country owe an enormous debt to her relentless and pioneering intellectual work and leadership'

(Hasan, 2012b: 179). Rokeya and her feminist sisters in the Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam (also known as the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference), distanced themselves from the movements of western feminists and their implied sexual antagonism. Her ground-breaking ideas shook Muslim Bengal and created widespread feminist consciousness in the region. Rokeya's immediate successors, such as Shamsunnahar Mahmud (1908–64), Razia Khatun Chaudhurani (1907–34) and Sufia Kamal (1911–99) did not exert equal influence. However, about 100 years after Rokeya's emergence, Taslima Nasrin produced a number of writings mostly of an autobiographical nature, marked by intimate revelations and critical remarks about Islam and its revered symbols. It created enormous controversy and drew huge national and international attention, both within and outside academic circles, in Bangladesh and beyond. Evidently, her feminism is markedly different from that of her predecessors.

Nasrin's Bangladeshi predecessors rejected western ideas of women's liberation and open sexuality and espoused to articulate an indigenous brand of feminism. Perhaps to avoid controversy, her contemporary feminist writers and groups in Bangladesh 'have largely remained conspicuously silent on the issue of sexuality' (Hossain & Hossain, 2002: 37) and tread very cautiously concerning the issues of religion. Yet Nasrin took a different path, detailed most personal and intimate sexual experiences, and explicitly denigrated the religion of the majority in Bangladesh. Thus, she is charged with replicating western ideas in a non-western cultural setting and her feminism espouses modernising values and women-centric sexual assertiveness. Her narrative of sexuality extends to 'uninhabited engagement with taboo topics such as…the "freedom of uterus"'…and a 'radical redefinition of virginity, motherhood, and women's right to polyandry' (Zafar, 2005: 414). It has earned her the labels of *rashtradrohi* and *dharmadrohi*, a person subversive to state and religion (Hossain & Hossain, 2002: 49).

Nasrin's feminist work and strategy has received much and often quite polarised critical response. Comments on Nasrin can be divided into two broad categories, appreciative and disapproving. Those who offer rave reviews for Nasrin's work consider her a victim of free speech restriction and the supposedly repressive Islamic patriarchy of Bangladesh. Conversely, those who are critical of her work and the way she handles the controversy over it sense a disturbing subtext of international literary politics that, perhaps, seeks to realise a larger political, neo-orientalist goal of vilifying Islam and of undermining a Muslim country through the Nasrin affair (Deen, 2006; Hashmi, 2000).

Nasrin Gone Global

Though much of her work is thought to be tempered with local politics, and both Islamic and secular intellectuals in Bangladesh are 'equally dismissive of her writings' (Alam, 1998: 429), Nasrin is the first Bangladeshi feminist writer to talk explicitly about sexuality, to criticise Islam voluminously and consistently, and to gain truly international recognition in the process. Since the early 1990s, mainly as a result of the ban on her works and lawsuits against her, she has received sustained critical attention

from writers around the world. She faced the first legal challenge in Bangladesh for her comments in an interview with Indian journalist Sujata Sen on 6 May 1994, published in the Calcutta-based *The Statesman* on 9 May 1994, that the Qur'an should be thoroughly revised (Hasan, 2010: 544). Faced with growing public criticism and agitations in Bangladesh and India, Nasrin later denied having made such a statement, contending that 'she was misquoted and it was Shariah not the Qur'an she wanted to be amended' (Hasan, 2010: 550). But Sujata Sen 'swears she neither misquoted nor misunderstood Nasrin' (Deen, 1999: 53). Sustained street agitations in Bangladesh demanded to have her punished for her anti-Bangladesh writing and anti-Islamic statements. Western literati, media and diplomatic missions swiftly came forward to rescue her. Later on, publication of her autobiographies *Amar Meyebela* (Nasrin, 1999; 2001 [1999]) and *Utal Hawa* (Nasrin, 2002), *Ka* (Nasrin, 2003b), *Dwikhandita* (Nasrin, 2003a)[7] and *Sei Sab Ondhakar* (Nasrin, 2004) exacerbated the already highly-charged controversy over the contents of her work and literary and feminist strategy. Over time, she has emerged as more explicit in the sexual description, more vociferous and aggressive in her criticism of Islam and more irreverent to Islamic symbols.

Nasrin's widespread international acclaim is, perhaps, worth investigating. A review of the degree of the recognition other Bengali Muslim women writers received especially from the international/western literary community indicates that the overarching importance given to Nasrin is not consistent with the usual critical or dismissive tendency in judging South Asian Muslim females' writings. The representation of Bengali Muslim women writers of the past and present, compared to those from other religious backgrounds, has been marginal (Hasan, 2012b). For example, in a foundational book on postcolonial feminism (Jayawardena, 2003 [1986]), Muslim feminist writers of Bengal, including Rokeya, are not discussed at all. Notably, the same book covers several Bengali Hindu women writers, although the history of Muslim women's literary production in Bengal is 'as old as that of their Hindu counterparts' (Hasan, 2012b: 180). Other literary histories and anthologies that focus exclusively, or, at least, have sections on Bengali women's writing would mention the solitary Rokeya among a dozen Hindu women writers (Tharu & Lalita, 1991). Thus in literary history, Bengali Muslim writers have largely been under-rated, as Akhtar (2008: xxiv) states,

> Histories of literature usually dedicate a chapter on Muslim writers, covering six centuries, from the medieval age to the nineteenth century. This chapter would be slim in the books published in West Bengal and comparatively thicker in those published in Bangladesh, although Bengali literature in this period was enriched by the contributions of both Hindu and Muslim writers....Muslim writers, irrespective of whether they were male or female, it goes without saying, have been largely ignored by most literary histories.

However, to the astonishment of Bangladeshis, the international media and literary feminist scholars seem overly enthusiastic about Taslima Nasrin. The Indian Ananda establishment gave her the Ananda Award twice, first for *Nirbachito Column* (Nasrin, 1992) in 1992, even though it provoked controversy over allegations of plagiarism,

and then for *Amar Meyebela* (Nasrin, 1999) in 2000. Hence, perhaps rightly, 'many Bangladeshi writers and intellectuals associated the award with anti-Muslim Hindu chauvinism in India…, a slap in the face of the nation because many well-established Bangladeshi writers had not been considered suitable for the award' (Hashmi, 2000: 195). Renowned Bangladeshi writer Syed Mujtaba Ali (1904–74) obtained this award in 1961, but at that time, he was an Indian citizen. Nasrin was followed by a few more Bangladeshi writers, namely Shamsur Rahman (1929–2006) jointly with Annada Shankar Ray (1905–2002) in 1994, Akhteruzzaman Elias (1943–97) in 1996 and Hasan Azizul Huq (1939–) in 2008. Surprisingly, all these later Ananda laureates had been well-established as the most formidable writers in the Bangla literary world long before Nasrin started writing. Regrettably, none of them was given the honour of being the first Bangladeshi to receive the Ananda award. That went to Nasrin.

In her early literary career, Nasrin had the support and patronage of many Dhaka-based writers and literary scholars, including those who later lagged behind her in receiving the Ananda recognition. However, after the Ananda Award and the worldwide media furore and frenzy on her, that support structure somewhat diminished. Some commentators theorise it as jealousy, but many suspect an anti-Bangladesh and anti-Islam campaign by India and the West behind the entire Nasrin saga. It is because, although internationally certain sections of western feminism promote a universalist slant and tend to provincialise feminist experiences and ideas that originate from other cultural settings, Nasrin's case has had a different treatment. It 'was well covered by the Western media. Almost every newspaper in Europe and America at one point or another published reports on her case' (Alam, 1998: 446). Deen (2006: xv) discerns 'a larger narrative of international literary politics' and 'the politics of the human rights groups involved in "rescuing" Nasrin and the role played by the Indian and Western media', whom she compares to 'the Dragon Slayers'. However, Nasrin later on alienated especially Bangladeshi sympathisers, who eventually regarded her 'as a publicity seeker who partly faked her "flight" from Bangladesh and who was more a celebrity than a writer' (Nash, 2012: 64).

Given Nasrin's reputation as extremely critical of Islam, her disproportionate international recognition, particularly in the West and regionally in India, creates doubts especially in Muslims' minds, possibly more so because of the troubled history of Islam and the West and India's poor record of protecting Muslims and their religious symbols. Understandably, India promoted Nasrin and her work, especially *Lajja* (Nasrin, 1994 [1993]), 'to distract the world's concern away from religious tensions and communal strife in India in the wake of the Babri Masjid's demolition in 1992' (Hasan, 2010: 540).

Rage and Religion

Nasrin's early writings mainly concern women's sufferings in the patriarchal society and the violations of their rights, especially in Bangladesh. Soon, sex and anti-male ideas emerged as the most important themes in her work. The next prominent phase

of her writing portrayed all religions, but especially Islam, as oppressive to women. Her autobiographical works suggest that her personal experiences in the family and in the society and her encounters with men, especially her first husband, greatly influenced her feminist ideas. For example, in *Amar Meyebela* (Nasrin, 1999), the first in her series of autobiographical works, three people are at the receiving end of domestic oppression: Ma (her mother), the maidservants in the house and herself, Ma being the worst sufferer. The principal oppressor is Baba (her father), followed by her two elder brothers and herself. In *Utal Hawa* (Nasrin, 2002), readers are introduced to another oppressor, her first husband. There are other incidental bad males, such as Uncle Sharaf and Uncle Aman, who had 'wanted to climb over her' even before she came of age (Nasrin, 2001 [1999]: 91).

Perhaps because of the gender relations Nasrin witnessed in her domestic environment and her failed relationships with various men, both in wedlock and extramarital, we see a predominance of rage and anger in her oeuvre. When Nasrin's radically anti-male ideas and anti-Islam campaigns created a huge uproar in Bangladesh in the early 1990s, readers may have been groping in the pages of her essays and poems to ascertain the sources of her ubiquitous fury, habitual male antagonism and criticism of Islam. Later, from 1999 onwards, her autobiographies started to give ample information about the sources.

One noticeable fact is that none of the men who supposedly abused Nasrin and her mother is religious. Nasrin's father was indifferent to religion and most critical of cultural values, especially concerning his daughters. Her husband and one of her uncles, Uncle Siddique, were hardcore atheists, while her two brothers, Noman and Kamal, had little to do with religion. Noman once refused to marry a girl because she carried a traditional Islamic name, Majeda, while Kamal married a Hindu woman, Geeta, later named Afroza. In her father's house, the less educated Ma was the only person to observe Islamic rituals, which her father did not like, as he once said: 'That woman is simply obsessed with the thought of going to heaven' (Nasrin, 2001 [1999]: 142). Interestingly, her mother was the only person with some human touch in the family. She was kind to the maidservants, especially little Renu, whom she gradually taught the Arabic and Bangla alphabets. However, the humaneness and religiosity of Nasrin's mother was overwhelmed by the inhumanity and irreligiosity of other family members.

According to Nasrin, her father was a domestic tyrant and a serial seducer. Apparently, he did not miss any opportunity to establish sexual intimacy with women who came under his influence, be it Chakladar's wife Razia Begum, the maidservants of the house, his daughter's friends' aunts or his women patients. Nasrin mentions that her husband, the poet Rudra Muhammad Shahidullah (1956–91), established an illicit sexual relationship with Nellie, his maternal uncle's wife's sister while he was in high school. Such extramarital sexual relationships are perceived as gross moral misdemeanour (*zina*) in Islam and in Bangladesh society. Obviously, the two worst oppressors of women in Nasrin's autobiography, her father and her first husband, had little personal regard for religion or conventional morality. Logically, then, Islam may

not be blamed for gender oppression in Nasrin's domestic environment. Moreover, if her mother is regarded as an embodiment of religion, even though her religious observances are largely ritualistic, the relationship between Nasrin's parents can be metaphorically read as the oppression of irreligion on religion. However, in her writings, right from the beginning, Nasrin consistently deprecates Islam and makes sarcastic remarks about its alleged gender inegalitarianism.

Nasrin's treatment of Muslim women can be compared to that of migrant communities by diasporic writers with Muslim connections like Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi and Monica Ali. These writers may have sympathies for the individual migrant characters they portray but are completely opposed to the 'beliefs and attitudes' of the larger Muslim migrant communities (Nash, 2012: 12). Indirectly, they establish complicity with stereotyping Muslims in a host society. Equally, Nasrin apparently has no dearth of sympathy for Ma but metaphorically wreaks violence on her by consistently denigrating what she believes. In other words, Nasrin's apparent sympathies with individual characters are not extended to the vast majority of Bangladeshi women who do not share her attitude towards Islam. Readers' sympathies may lie with Monica Ali's Nazneen in *Brick Lane* (Ali, 2003) and Nasrin's Ma in *Amar Meyebela* (Nasrin, 1999), but these authors have chosen such little educated Muslim women characters only to satirise and deride them and to caricature what they believe. They hardly display any concern for their upliftment.

Vituperations against Islam and Muslims

In *Ka*, Nasrin (2003b: 45) uses the metaphor of the black cobra to describe Islam and recommends sweeping it with a broom. She makes derogatory remarks about God, the Prophet of Islam and devout Muslims in a highly provocative and stereotypical manner. Nasrin confesses that she has no interest in learning or understanding Islam. The elements of hatred and prejudice seem more prominent in relation to religion. According to her own admission, she has made no serious effort to gain profound knowledge of Islam and even states, 'Now that I knew, I did not wish to delve any deeper…' (Nasrin, 2001 [1999]: 275).[8] Conspicuous lack of academic interest and effort or ability is obvious in her criticism of Islam.

Nasrin (2002) uses a stereotypical representation of Muslims, claiming that illiterate and uneducated people who had no scientific knowledge would believe in religion. According to her, believers in Islam do not have any brain. When it comes to criticising Islam, many of her statements are charged with emotions, outright impropriety and offensiveness, and break boundaries of respectability and civility. For example, she overgeneralises and slanders all hijab-clad Iranian women, lampooning them by saying that they strip themselves naked in doctors' chamber on flimsy excuses (Nasrin, 2006: 102). Such strident, sweeping comments on Iranian Muslim women and on another country suggest insensitive cultural caricaturing. It can be regarded, to use Nash's (2012: 11) words, as 'the latest version of Orientalist mumbo-jumbo' or 'recycled

Orientalist tropes' (Nash, 2012: 26). Nasrin does not seem to appreciate the bond of feminist sisterhood with women who choose to wear the hijab. It does not seem to strike her as unseemly of an apparently feminist crusader to make overgeneralised, offensive suppositions about other women.

The Qur'an repeatedly emphasises that Muslims, who do good deeds and shun evil, will enter heaven in the life hereafter. But in Nasrin's view, the criteria for entering Islamic paradise are totally different as she ridicules and satirises her mother's religiosity,

> And you, who will go to heaven, you will get to see all the Muslim fanatics. You will meet the wicked scoundrel Mollahs, four-times married. They are hunting people, creating jealousy, backbiting and killing people. They are committing 108 rapes, troubling their wives, beating them, but because they are chanting Allah, Allah the whole day, they go to heaven…. In heaven you will find Baba...who has never looked back at you all your life….What happiness are you seeking in your wish to go to Heaven? For what do you observe Rozas [fasting] and Namaz [prayer]? (Nasrin, 2002: 293)

Actually, in Islam, all these qualities Nasrin mentions in the quote above disqualify a Muslim to enter paradise. It is untenable and self-contradictory here that she portrays her father as one of the dwellers of heaven, whereas throughout her writings, she depicts him as an irreligious sex maniac. It betrays her tenacity to vent insulting, denunciatory invectives against Islam. By 'four-times married' she refers to the practice of polygyny, which Muslim scholars argue Islam permits in specific circumstances. Islam did not invent polygyny, nor do Muslims have any monopoly on it. The vast majority of Muslims do not practise polygyny, and it is also not as frequent in Bangladesh as in some other Muslim-majority countries. Most of Nasrin's arraignments against Muslims in the above quote may thus be interpreted as poor polemics and do not merit any academic response.

For the sake of argument, I touch here on the issue of the husband's treatment of his wife, which Nasrin uses apparently to undermine Islam. The Qur'an (4: 19) and prophetic teachings explicitly instruct Muslim men to treat their wives well. Schleifer (1986: 85) argues that 'Muslims are counselled to treat their children equally, to treat wives equally, etc. Total equality is a concept which exists only in relationship to just rewards, good or bad, in the Hereafter, for deeds accomplished during one's lifetime'. Nasrin was surely aware of the vast differences between such idealising perceptions and lived experience. Contrary to what she depicts, people like her father, who trouble and beat their wives, are not the best example of Muslims.

Apart from her sarcastic remarks about Islam and flagrant caricature of Muslims, there is no serious scholarly discussion in her debate on women's rights in Islam. In a few places, where she tries to question the status of women in Islam, she relies, according to Hashmi (2000: 197–8), on second-hand information, literal translations of the Qur'an and unauthentic hadith literature. Above all, she displays a complete lack of knowledge of how many Muslim intellectuals throughout history have been critical of the backward-looking local Mullas and other traditional Muslim spokespersons.

Hashmi's observations are corroborated by Deen (2006), who travelled to three continents spanning more than five years and interviewed over 100 people who know about Nasrin's life and works to collect her information. A publisher in Dhaka told Deen that whenever Nasrin wanted to write on Islam, she looked for cheap, unreliable materials written by lay people or 'third-rate commentaries written by uneducated mullahs', whose opinion about Islam should not be given academic credibility (Deen, 2006: 128).

Indeed, a source like Rahman (2007 [1935]) is a household article for many Muslims in Bangladesh. Extremely popular, this book is full of misogynistic elements and mostly based on popular cultural mythologies and pseudo-religious beliefs rather than authentic Islamic teachings. While serious Islamic scholars reject this book outright, Nasrin seems to have equated this book with the Qur'an or hadith and based her criticism of Islam on it.

Appropriation of Her Work

While Nasrin has remained consistent in her criticism of Islam, others have appropriated her work to wrongly represent Islam and Muslims in a quintessentially neo-orientalist manner. For example, *Lajja* (Nasrin, 1994 [1993]), which is highly critical of Bangladeshi Muslims, had originally six chapters, but its Indian edition was expanded to thirteen (Deen, 2006: 94) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India distributed it free after including 'sections not in the original novel' (Siddiqi, 2009: 32). The American version of *Lajja* carries the subtitle 'The Provocative Book that Unleashed a Storm in the Muslim World' (Zafar, 2005: 416), an interpolation that contains a deliberate vilification of the Muslim world on the basis of a context-specific, localised and controversial book.

In the world of Nasrin's *Amar Meyebela*, Islam is conspicuously absent in its characters except in the life of her oppressed mother. However, in the American edition of its English version, it has been appropriated to provoke and re-enforce prejudices against Islam and Muslims. While the English translation of *Amar Meyebela* (Nasrin, 2001 [1999]) is 'My Girlhood', the American edition of the book, published in the post-9/11 era, carries the interpolative title *Meyebela: My Bengali Girlhood—A Memoir of Growing up Female in a Muslim World*. The electronic bookselling company Amazon summarises it in a synopsis in the manner of neo-orientalist paternalism, using old colonial clichés and states,[9]

> This unique book throws open a window on a world unknown to most Westerners. The word Meyebela, girlhood, was coined by Taslima Nasrin because no precise term existed in her native language for a female's experience of childhood. This seemingly small omission speaks volumes about the fate of millions of girls and women living in societies in which females are treated as second-class citizens. Renowned Bengali dissident Nasrin is an exception. Precocious and well educated, she managed to pursue careers as a physician and a writer, and in telling her own story is able to speak for others. In prose

> that is at once lyrical and vivid, Nasrin takes the reader on an unforgettable journey to a place and time that will seem quite distant to the Western reader but which remains little changed today, and for millions of girls and women is the only world they know.

What Amazon appears to insinuate here is that while the world is moving and getting rid of gender oppression and cultural mythologies, this imagined Muslim world still dwells in the primitive days, and in places like Bangladesh, which are backward and anachronistic. This buttresses arguments that although social practice varies throughout the Islamic world, Westerners have often described Islam, and particularly women's roles in Islam, as static and fixed. In this respect, Tax (2002: 1) expresses pertinent concerns about the distorted English rendering when she states with reference to America that '[i]n a society that knows little about any variety of Islam, the dark picture painted by Nasrin may be universalized, and welcomed all too eagerly'.

The spurious title of *Amar Meyebela*'s American edition may be interpreted as sales hype, but it frustrates an otherwise admirable argument and Nasrin's putative symbolic protest against the Bangla linguistic order where girlhood (*meyebela*) is generally covered and subsumed by the term boyhood (*chelebela*). Perhaps, by parodying Tagore's (1940) *Chelebela*, Nasrin wanted to convey an important message, that although in the Bangla language the term girlhood is overshadowed by boyhood, a girl's life is equally important to record and equally worth narrativising. Unfortunately, the distorted title of the American edition and the book's synopsis frustrate this message and ignore the fact that much has changed in Bangladesh meanwhile. Surprisingly, the outspoken and straight-talking Nasrin is not known to have protested against these distortions. This silence on her part may further confirm her participation and complicity in the vilification of Islam, Muslims, Islamic symbols and Bangladesh.

Critiquing Nasrin's Feminist Strategy of Deprecating Islam

Nasrin's ubiquitous vituperations against Islam are supposedly in the service of women's rights, though they affront millions of Muslims including those who treat their mothers, wives, daughters and other women with respect, because Islam has commanded them to do so. To endorse such offensive remarks for the service of 'free speech' may render the entire issue of freedom of expression problematic (Hasan, 2010). Such remarks injure Muslims' psyche and unnecessarily breed strife and unrest in the society. For example, they prompted the killing of two teenage boys during the height of the anti-Nasrin campaign in Bangladesh in 1994 and of two more people in India's state of Karnataka in early March 2010 (Hasan, 2010: 549). Moreover, Nasrin's critics believe that such a head-on war against Islam harms the noble cause of the women's rights movement in Bangladesh. It is simply confrontational, rather than constructively engaging with 'the other'.

Since Nasrin identifies herself as a feminist, ordinary people readily associate her—and for that matter, habitual hatred of Islam—with feminism, which ultimately makes

various efforts to establish women's rights in a Muslim society difficult. According to a social worker, who promotes women's rights in the remote countryside of Bangladesh, (quoted in Hashmi, 2000: 203), 'Nasrin went for the jugular, and we're not ready for that. There's simply too much at stake. You have to learn how to deal with the situation… And that is something Nasrin never understood'. Tax (2002: 4) rightly argues that Nasrin 'generalizes incorrectly about Islam from the variant she experienced in Bangladesh and that anyway you can't change the culture by attacking it head on'. But Nasrin is not convinced, as quoted in Tax (2002: 5), she remonstrates,

> People often tell me it is a question of tactics…but I do not believe in tactics…. Using tactics takes too long; it will take too much time to establish secularism this way…. What I want is a revolution - for women's freedom, for humanism, and to throw out unnecessary things like religion.

Begum Rokeya, whom most of the Bangladeshis hold in very high esteem, also engaged in the debates of women's position in Islam. Being 'a passionate advocate of change' (Hossain, 1992: 1), she critiqued its patriarchal, male-centric interpretation and re-examined it in the light of gender justice, whereas Nasrin uncritically takes the prevalent patriarchal notions of Islam as the norm and simply denigrates religion. Though Nasrin does refer to Rokeya in a number of places in her writing, conceivably to earn legitimacy in Bangladesh society, she does not follow her feminist strategy.

Rokeya fought for women's right in Bengal at the time when women were, both literally and metaphorically, secluded in the house, were denied formal education and were totally invisible in public life as their mobility was restricted by the notion of extreme seclusion (purdah). Rokeya trod cautiously and differentiated Islam from cultural practices, which earned her a much-needed support structure. As a result, although Rokeya also had detractors, the number of her admirers and supporters among both liberal and religious sections of the society overwhelmed the opposition she faced, helping her to make significant headway in the establishment of women's rights. Today, significant credit is given to Rokeya for her relentless struggle to create awareness among people about women's rights, as the feminist movement in Muslim Bengal took off in a real sense with her intellectual work, education movement and political activism.

Conversely, despite all the regional and international accolades Nasrin has received, and despite her prolificacy as a writer, her work has contributed little to the feminist struggle of Bangladeshi women. Nasrin and most other Bangladeshi feminists are polarised, and the relationship between them is impermeable. This is perhaps a result of Nasrin's inability to understand the structural and deep-seated causes of women's oppression in Bangladesh and her questionable diagnosis of gender relations there. Unlike her, Rokeya correctly identified the manifest and concealed causes of women's plight in the society rather than in religion per se and addressed them in a strategically effective way. Although the detractors of women's educational, economic and legal

rights continued to use pseudo-Islamic arguments to check women's movement and to marginalise them, Rokeya did not launch a head-on attack on Islam. She rather located and emphasised the gender egalitarian aspects of her religion and used them to foreground her campaign for women's rights.

Conversely, despite the fact that the gender oppressors in Nasrin's autobiography are irreligious, she attempts to ridicule and denigrate Islam for gender oppression and thus loses much-needed public support. Rokeya's approach was evidently poles apart from Nasrin's. Although most of the opponents of female education in her society had a religious orientation, Rokeya did not choose to attack Islam for their wrong interpretation of its teachings. For example, the patriarchal establishment was opposed to Rokeya's campaign for female education. Flimsy reasons were used, such as the plea that, once educated, women would be disobedient. In such cases, Rokeya used Islamic religious texts to counteract her society's opposition to female education. Significantly by reference to 'Our great Prophet', Rokeya stated that 'it is the duty of all Muslim males and females to acquire knowledge. But our brothers will not give us our proper share in education' (Hossain, 2006 [1927]: 491). Such argumentative style gave legitimacy to Rokeya's feminist movement in a Muslim society and rendered the Muslim patriarchal establishment intellectually and religiously defenceless. While she argued 'for a shift in the way men perceived women and women saw themselves, she was anxious that they should not lose their Muslim identity' (Hossain, 1992: 1). Conversely, Nasrin habitually castigates Muslims for their belief in Islam, apparently because she herself rejects religion per se. Nasrin has also chosen to make blatantly blasphemous statements against the Prophet. This sustained invective against the Prophet, widespread in her work, does not help advance women's empowerment. It rather created untoward reactions among the rank and file of the Muslim community and led to violent protests. Unlike Nasrin, Rokeya paid the highest tribute to the Prophet and regarded him as a great liberator of women's rights. She proclaimed,[10]

> In Arab society, where women were being oppressed and female infanticide was widespread, the Prophet Muhammad came to their rescue. He not only promulgated some precepts but also set an example of how to treat women with respect. He showed how to love one's daughter by demonstrating his love to Fatima [his daughter]. That love and affection for one's daughter is rare on earth. Alas! It is because of his absence among us that we women are in such a despicable plight! (Hossain, 2006 [1904]: 30–1)

In sharp contrast with Nasrin, Rokeya here mentions the Prophet's name most respectfully and represents him as a great emancipator of women. She specifically criticises Muslim men's non-compliance with the Prophet's teachings on gender issues and thus exposes the insincerity of Muslim men who profess a profound love of Muhammad but refuse to obey him in regard to gender relations (Hossain, 2006 [1928]: 447). Rokeya chose to use Islam as the framework for her feminist struggle and not to denigrate it. Perhaps that is the reason why her ideas could make such

tremendous impact on establishing women's rights in her time and afterwards, even though she had to begin from scratch.

Unlike Rokeya, Nasrin could rely on a well-established feminist tradition in Bangladesh, much of whose credit goes mainly to Rokeya's huge sacrifice and relentless activism. In Nasrin's Bangladesh, women are no longer strictly secluded, their presence and participation in the public life is spectacularly evident, and they have made remarkable breakthroughs in education and employment (Salway et al., 2005). Nasrin does not seem to appreciate the hard work of her predecessors who made extreme sacrifices and attained significant achievement in women's empowerment. Nasrin's polemical impulse and her anti-Islamic rants have rather earned a bad name for feminism in Bangladesh. To some extent, she seems to have impeded the progress that the feminist movement in Bangladesh was making steadily over time. For many God-fearing ordinary Bangladeshis, feminism equates Nasrin, but Nasrin equates with anti-male, anti-Islam, erotica and pornography. On the other hand, with great sacrifice, daredevil courage, enormous devotion and painstaking hard work, Rokeya had created a space for women in what is now Bangladesh. Unfortunately, based on her attitude of intense aversion and disrespect to Islam and Muslims, Nasrin seems to have obviated that carefully-cultivated feminist tradition of creating spaces for women's empowerment within an Islamic context.

Regarding feminist strategy, Kandiyoti (1996: 9) argues that feminist discourse in Muslim society can 'only legitimately proceed in two directions: either denying that Islamic practices are necessarily oppressive or asserting that oppressive practices are not necessarily Islamic'. Most Islamic feminists follow the second approach. Although the term Islamic feminism has been used only since the 1990s, 'Islamic intellectual encounters with feminism date back to the early twentieth century' (Samiuddin & Khanam, 2002: v), especially in the context of South Asian Muslim women's struggle for education and social justice. Islamic feminism challenges socio-cultural assumptions of gender roles and emphasises Islamic formulations of gender. Islamic feminists 'criticize erroneous interpretations, and use the scope for interpretation provided by the text… to construct a discourse… that sets them free before God and does not subject them to the masochistic imagery of either East or West' (Ramadan, 2004: 141–2). Islam, for them, 'places two sexes in a position of equality before God, although in social terms, women were subordinate to men' (Ray, 2002: 43). Treatment of women in the Qur'an provides them with a strong theoretical foregrounding, as they believe women's actual liberation lies in the proper understanding of Islam, not in deviating from it. Islamic feminism is indigenous and has its own framework to address its encounter with patriarchy; it does not fully comply with Western ideas about women's rights.

Rokeya arguably fought for women's rights from such an Islamic feminist perspective, while Nasrin follows the feminist neo-orientalist approach. Rokeya pointed out gender-oppressive elements and customs. Like latter-day Islamic feminists, she sought to draw a distinct line between 'establishment Islam' (Ahmed, 1992: 225), which is authoritarian, implacably androcentric and hostile to women, and the general ethical

messages in the Qur'an. She attempted to separate Islamic teachings from patriarchal influences and made a consistent comeback call to Muslims to revisit Islamic texts with a prism of gender justice. Conversely, Nasrin gives complete credence to the neo-orientalist representation of Islam with regard to gender issues and basically has no time for religion. Thus, she largely isolates herself from the indigenous feminist movement and from local articulations of feminist perspectives and agendas.

It is important to evaluate Nasrin's ideas regarding Islam and women's rights, not with the prism of women's experiences in the west but in the context of Bangladesh society that is beset not only by patriarchy but also by the curses of poverty, ignorance, overpopulation, religious conservatism, political instability and natural disasters. As O'Connell (2001: 194) states,

> Faced with staggering problems in economic, social, political, and religious life, the typical peasants and labourers of Bangladesh cannot live by language and the refinements of literature alone. In material terms, they need food, work, and basic security; in symbolic terms, they need to find meaning in their lives, inspiration for the sacrifices they are called upon to make, and a sense of security and solidarity. They seek leadership offering a message that speaks to them in an idiom they can understand and respect.

In such a socio-cultural setting, simply vilifying Islam in the service of feminism may not bring any positive changes in women's life. Unfortunately, the language Nasrin uses apparently to establish women's rights is just offensive and disrespectful to the cultural and religious sentiment of the vast majority of Bangladeshis. If she could use an idiom which Bangladeshis can appreciate and respect, the various strands of the feminist movement in Bangladesh would enormously benefit from her work.

According to Hassan (1996: 368), using Islamophobic rhetoric to promote women's rights is a contradiction in terms, as she rhetorically asks: 'Are Muslim women also not adherents of Islam? And are Muslim women also not victims of "Muslim-bashing"?' Likewise, Hasan (2012a: 75) argues that the 'strategy of denigrating Islam to establish women's rights in Muslim societies has not rendered any good service to women or to feminism'. By consistently denigrating Islam for the alleged incompatibility between Islam and women's rights, Nasrin hurts the religious feelings of the very women whose rights she claims to protect. If she had followed Rokeya's feminist strategy, she could have lived in Bangladesh with respect and with a large following. That may not have earned her the international accolade and celebrity status and global eminence as a wronged feminist, but she would have been able to continue the legacy of Rokeya. However, that is now inconceivable.

Concluding Analysis

This article recounts how Rokeya shook Muslim Bengal a century ago with her feminist agenda of women's education and empowerment and liberated women from the dark recesses of seclusion and domestic incarceration. It showed in contrast how

Taslima Nasrin chose to ignore or discard that strategy. The women's rights movement in the region today remains in dire need for resounding voices to continue Rokeya's legacy. Unfortunately, no one before or after Rokeya has matched her in deep interest, resilience or creative gift in championing women's rights and there has been a gaping vacuum in Bangla literature in terms of telling the stories of Bangladeshi women. A successor and feminist crusader of Rokeya's magnitude could resume her intellectual culture and take up her unfinished work. Nasrin definitely has the tenacity to pursue the feminist cause and to challenge the cultural values and mores of the patriarchal social order. However, the strategy and methodology she follows have not been helpful to advance women's causes in a country like Bangladesh. The vigour and forcefulness of Nasrin's work indicate the urgency of addressing women's multifarious problems in Bangladesh society and the distinction of her creativity may be acknowledged. She could be a capable successor of Rokeya and thus metaphorically benefit all the down-trodden women of her country and beyond. However, as argued in this article, her shrill, confrontational and aggressive feminist strategy of deprecating Islam and its followers limits her perspective and ultimately frustrates her feminist objectives.

To her critics, the ubiquity of criticism of Islam in her writing betrays her prejudice and lack of respect to what men and women of her society hold in high esteem. Islam is fundamental to Bangladesh society, a fact which is now explicitly recognised in the country's recently revised Constitution, which at the same time makes a commitment to Islam as a state religion and acknowledges the presence of local diversities and religious pluralism. Despite its earlier rabid socialist rhetoric, which contributed to characterising the incumbent ruling party in Bangladesh as anti-Islamic, the strategy it has lately followed in revising the Constitution shows that it has realised that separation of law and religion is an unsuitable strategy in a country like Bangladesh, and that 'the more productive and realistic approach is to address religious pluralism as well as the connections of religion with politics, society, economics and of course psychology and philosophy, and to put all of this on the table for debate' (Menski, 2015: 29).

Importantly, before coming to power, the current government had made an explicit commitment not to pass any anti-Islamic legislation. The recent sophisticated political and legal strategy to clarify the country's multi-vocal vision confirms that any affront to Islam will hurt the religious feelings of the vast majority of the people including women, causing unnecessary strife to society as a whole. Denigrating people's belief, while supposedly trying to promote their rights, will not make a real difference in their plight. Moreover, no feminist purpose is served, as Nash (2012: 2) puts it, by 'making war with a religion'.

Intellectuals and commentators who promote secularism and espouse somewhat total disregard for religion and obliteration of any influence of it on the state matters, especially in the context of Bangladesh, may not understand the various meanings of secularism properly. They tend to reduce it to 'the French model of laïcité', as Menski (2015: 28) points out, the theoretical possibility but practical impossibility in South Asian contexts of complete separation of the state and religion. Members of the local

elite who seek to create an artificial distance between the religion of the majority, Islam and public issues, including gender relations, are thus mentally imprisoned by Western concepts that clearly do not work well in South Asian conditions. Taslima Nasrin, as her writings confirm, has apparently failed to grasp that.

Replicating western notions of women's rights, without appreciating local realities, generally contributes to the rise of so-called Islamism and resultant street demonstrations. For example, the National Women Development Policy (Jatiya Nari Unnayan Niti) in its various manifestations in 1997, 2008 and 2011 generated considerable uproar, especially among Islamic groups, as this policy was presumed to give women equal inheritance rights, which would directly contradict a Qur'anic verse (4: 11). While the scope of this article does not allow for detailed discussion on women's inheritance, it has been shown here that the Nasrin affair has left a stark message, namely that aggressive highlighting of contested issues like inheritance, polygamy, same-sex marriage and promoting anti-Islamic legislations may cause more harm than good to the wider goal of ameliorating the condition of women and minorities in Bangladesh. Moreover, given the status of most of the women in Bangladesh, there are more important and urgent concerns at stake than these controversial ones, including 'education, spousal abuse, humane treatment for women and so on' (Bullock, 2002: xxviii), for which feminist activists can work with public consensus, policy legitimisation and without generating untoward furore.

On a final note, we thus see that despite Nasrin's international profile and global recognition, she has not been able to understand this nexus and fails to make any meaningful contribution to the continuous struggle to remove legal and social disabilities of women in Bangladesh. What she has created in Bangladesh society instead is a deep sense of suspicion in common people's mind about feminism and various noble efforts to establish and strengthen women's rights. The enthusiastic international recognition Nasrin enjoys complicates the relationship between the meta-narratives of modernity and mainstream western feminism and the ground realities of women's condition in Bangladesh. Moreover, appropriating Nasrin's context-specific work in order to undermine Islam and the Muslim world in the post-9/11 era may remain a blot on the collective feminist consciousness around the globe. That is not to say that academic discussion on women's status in Islam or policy debates on their condition in Bangladesh today should be discouraged. But an appropriate way of pursuing it, as this article has shown, is not the one that Nasrin has chosen. In fact, her anti-religious stance pours oil into the fire of those who wish to claim, against better knowledge, that pursuing a plural vision of Bangladesh today, built on respect for nationalism, democracy and socialism, as well as respect for all religions under the much-misunderstood label of secularism, is the need of the hour. Noble political causes, including the rights of women and of other marginalised groups and commitment to Islam, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The present analysis thus reinforces the growing realisation in Bangladesh today that aggressive, anti-religious secularism of the kind pursued by Taslima Nasrin does not create a suitable framework to pursue gender issues in the specific socio-cultural setting of Bangladesh.

Notes

1. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932) is widely known in Bangladesh as Begum Rokeya. In this article, I primarily use Rokeya to follow 'the Bangla convention of referring to the author… by first name' (Tickell, 2005: 7). However, bibliographical details are entered under 'Hossain' for the sake of consistency with current academic conventions.
2. Her last name is also given as Nasreen.
3. See generally Devji (1991); Hashmi (2000); Mir-Hosseini (2011); Razavi & Jenichen (2010) and Sobhan (1994).
4. Not much is known about Taherunnesa's life and work, except that her *Bamagoner Rachana* (Writing by Women) appeared in *Bamabodhini Patrika* in 1865.
5. Her semi-autobiographical and allegorical fiction *Rupjajal* was published from Dhaka in 1876. It is now translated by Hasanat (2009).
6. Karimunnessa is Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's elder sister.
7. *Ka* and *Dwikhandita* are two different titles of the same text. The former is published from Dhaka, the latter from Calcutta.
8. This particular quote continues in really offensive language and its context identifies a reaction to earlier experiences of sexual abuse.
9. See Amazon, 'Meyebela: My Bengali Girlhood – A Memoir of Growing Up Female in a Muslim World'. URL (consulted 20 August 2015), from http://www.amazon.co.uk/Meyebela-Bengali-Girlhood-Memoir-Growing/dp/1844370216
10. The original source is Hossain (2006 [1904]: 30–1). The English translation is provided by the present author.

References

Ahmed, Leila (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Akhtar, Shaheen (2008) 'Notes by the Editors: Finding Their Own Path'. In Shaheen Akhtar & Moushumi Bhowmik (Eds), *Women in Concert: An Anthology of Bengali Muslim Women's Writings* (pp. xxi–xxxii). Kolkata: Stree.

Alam, S.M. Shamsul (1998) 'Women in the Era of Modernity and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Case of Taslima Nasrin of Bangladesh', *Signs*, 23(2): 429–61.

Ali, Monica (2003) *Brick Lane*. London: Black Swan.

Bullock, Katherine (2002) *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical & Modern Stereotypes*. Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought.

Deen, Hanifa (1999) *Broken Bangles*. New Delhi: Penguin.

——— (2006) *The Crescent and the Pen: The Strange Journey of Taslima Nasreen*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Devji, Faisal (1991) 'Gender and the Politics of Space: The Movement for Women's Reform in Muslim India, 1857–1900', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 14(1): 141–53.

Hasan, Md. Mahmudul (2010) 'Free Speech, Ban and "Fatwa": A Study of the Taslima Nasrin Affair', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 46(5): 540–52.

——— (2012a) 'Feminism as Islamophobia: A Review of Misogyny Charges against Islam', *Intellectual Discourse*, 20(1): 55–78.

——— (2012b) 'Marginalisation of Muslim Writers in South Asian Literature: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's English Works', *South Asia Research*, 32(3): 179–97.

Hasanat, Fayeza S. (Tr.) (2009) *Nawab Faizunnesa's Rupjalal*. Leiden: Brill.
Hashmi, Taj ul-Islam (2000) *Women and Islam in Bangladesh: Beyond Subjection and Tyranny*. London: Macmillan.
Hassan, Riffat (1996) 'Rights of Women within Islamic communities'. In John Witte & Johan D. van der Vyver (Eds), *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective* (pp. 361–86). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
Hossain, Rokeya Sakhawat (2006 [1904]) 'Motichur' [Pearl Dust]–1. In Abdul Quadir (Ed.), *Rokeya Rachanabali* (pp. 1–54). Dhaka: Bangla Academy.
——— (2006 [1927]) 'God Gives, Man Robs'. In Abdul Quadir (Ed.), *Rokeya Rachanabali* (pp. 491–2). Dhaka: Bangla Academy.
——— (2006 [1928]) 'Pointrish Maund Khana' [Thirty-five Maund Food]. In Abdul Quadir (Ed.), *Rokeya Rachanabali* (pp. 444–7). Dhaka: Bangla Academy.
Hossain, Sara & Hossain, Hameeda (2002) 'Feminism and Feminist Movement in Bangladesh'. In Abida Samiuddin & R. Khanam (Eds), *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement: South Asia*. (Vol. 3, pp. 1–62). Delhi: Global Vision.
Hossain, Yasmin (1992) 'The Begum's Dream: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and the Broadening of Muslim Women's Aspirations in Bengal'. *South Asia Research*, 12(1): 1–19.
Jayawardena, Kumari (2003 [1986]) *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. Colombo: Sanjiva Books.
Kandiyoti, Deniz (1996) 'Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies'. In Deniz Kandiyoti (Ed.), *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives* (pp. 1–28). New York: Syracuse University Press.
Malak, Amin (1989) 'Reading the Crisis: The Polemics of Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses"', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 20(4): 176–86.
Menski, Werner (2015) 'Bangladesh in 2015: Challenges of the *Iccher Ghuri* for Learning to Live Together', *University of Asia Pacific Journal of Law & Policy*, 1(1): 7–30.
Mir-Hosseini, Ziba (2011) 'Beyond "Islam" vs "Feminism"', *IDS Bulletin. Institute of Development Studies*, 42(1): 67–77.
Nash, Geoffrey (2012) *Writing Muslim Identity*. London: Continuum.
Nasrin, Taslima (1992) *Nirbachito Column* [Selected Columns]. Dhaka: Gyankosh.
——— (1994 [1993]) *Lajja* (Tr. Tutul Gupta). New Delhi: Penguin.
——— (1999) *Amar Meyebela* [My Girlhood]. Calcutta: People's Book Society.
——— (2001 [1999]) *My Girlhood: An Autobiography* (Tr. Gopa Majumdar). New Delhi: Kali for Women.
——— (2002) *Utal Hawa* [My Youth]. URL (consulted 22 August 2011), from http://taslimanasrin.com/MY%20YOUTH.htm
——— (2003a) *Dwikhandita* [Split in Two]. Calcutta: People's Book Society.
——— (2003b) *Ka* [Speak Up]. Dhaka: Chardik.
——— (2004) *Sei Sab Ondhakar* [All Those Darkness]. Taslimanasrin.com. URL (consulted 30 November 2009), from http://taslimanasrin.com/sei-sob-ondhokar.pdf
——— (2006) *Column Somogra* [Collection of Columns]. Dhaka: Chardik.
O'Connell, Joseph T. (2001) 'The Bengali Muslims and the State: Secularism or Humanity for Bangladesh?' In Rafiuddin Ahmed (Ed.), *Understanding the Bengal Muslims: Interpretative Essays* (pp. 179–208). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Rahman, Gholam (2007 [1935]) *Maksudul Momeneen* [Objectives of the Faithful] (52nd Edition). Dhaka: Rahmania Library.

Ramadan, Tariq (2004) *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Ray, Bharati (2002) *Early Feminists of Colonial India: Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Razavi, Shahra & Jenichen, Anne (2010) 'The Unhappy Marriage of Religion and Politics: Problems and Pitfalls for Gender Equality', *Third World Quarterly*, 31(6): 833–50.
Salway, Sarah, Jesmin, Sonia & Rahman, Shabana (2005) 'Women's Employment in Urban Bangladesh: A Challenge to Gender Identity?', *Development and Change*, 36(2): 317–49.
Samiuddin, Abida & Khanam, R. (2002) 'Preface'. In A. Samiuddin & R. Khanam (Eds), *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement: South Asia* (Vol. 3, pp. v–x). Delhi: Global Vision.
Schleifer, Aliah (1986) *Motherhood in Islam*. Cambridge: The Islamic Academy.
Siddiqi, Dina M. (2009) 'Taslima Nasrin and Others: The Contest Over Gender in Bangladesh'. In Ali Riaz (Ed.), *(Re)Reading Taslima Nasrin* (pp. 15–41). Dhaka: Shrabon.
Sobhan, Salma (1994) 'National Identity, Fundamentalism and the Women's Movement in Bangladesh'. In Valentine M. Moghadam (Ed.), *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (pp. 63–80). London: Zed Books.
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1999) *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
Tagore, Rabindranath (1940) *Chelebela* [My Boyhood Days]. Calcutta: Biśvabhāratī Granthālaẏa.
Tax, Meredith (2002) 'Taslima's Pilgrimage', *The Nation* (31 October). URL (consulted 3 May 2011), from http://www.thenation.com/article/taslimas-pilgrimage
Tharu, Susie & Lalita, K. (Eds) (1991) *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present* (Vol. 1). London: Pandora.
Tickell, Alex (2005) 'Introduction'. In A. Tickell (Ed) *Shoshee Chunder Dutt: Selections from 'Bengaliana'* (pp. 7–22). Nottingham: Trent Editions.
Zafar, Manmay (2005) 'Under the Gaze of the State: Policing Literature and the Case of Taslima Nasrin', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 6(3): 410–21.

Md Mahmudul Hasan is Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). He completed his PhD in feminist comparative literature from the University of Portsmouth in 2007. He then taught at the University of Dhaka before joining IIUM and held visiting appointments in Baroda and Heidelberg. His research focuses on the postcolonial feminist literature, South Asian literature in English and Islamic literature.
Address: Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Malaysia, 53100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. [e-mail: mmhasan@iium.edu.my]

The Taslima Nasrin Controversy And Feminism In Bangladesh: A Geo-Political And Transnational Perspective[1]

Habiba Zaman

ABSTRACT

Taslima Nasrin, a Bangladeshi writer, attracted international attention in 1994 when an obscure religious fundamentalist group issued a *fatwa* sentencing her to death and demanding her trial on charges of blasphemy. This paper discusses the Nasrin controversy in the context of post-colonial religious fundamentalism, communalism, and feminist issues in South Asia.

RÉSUMÉ

Talima Nasrin, une écrivaine bangladaise, a attiré l'attention du monde entier en 1994 lorsqu'un groupe fondamentaliste d'une religion obscure avait lancé un *fatwa* la condamnant à mort et demandant son procès pour blasphème. Cet article discute de la controverse Nasrin dans le contexte religieux fondamentaliste post-colonial, l'esprit communautaire, et les questions féministes dans l'Asie du Sud.

In 1994, at the height of the Taslima Nasrin controversy, the *New Yorker* and the *London Review of Books* published two fairly long pieces on her saga (Weaver 1994; Wright 1994). Knowing that as a Bangladeshi woman I would be interested, a mentor and friend of mine sent the clippings to me with a note that read:

> Now I wait to read what a Bangladesh woman will have to say about Nasreen (she sounds pretty headlong, headstrong to me and not quite mature!). One would think she'd learn something of wisdom rather than anger from three marriages!! Eh?[2]

Until 1993, Nasrin[3] was largely unknown outside Bangladesh and West Bengal in India. Nasrin attracted international attention in May 1994 when an obscure fundamentalist group issued a *fatwa* (religious sanction)[4] sentencing Nasrin to death, put a bounty of *taka* 50,000 (US$1,250) on her head and demanded her trial on charges of blasphemy. The Western media immediately labelled her a Bangladeshi "female Salman Rushdie" (MacWilliam 1994). The international media presented Bangladesh as an Iranian-style theocracy where women are oppressed because of Islam and described Nasrin, who spoke out, as a victim of a fundamentalist attack (Wright 1994). Nasrin was quoted as saying: "I will not be silenced. Everywhere I look I see women being mistreated and their oppression justified in the name of religion. Is it not my moral responsibility to protest?" (*Outlook* 1994, 25).

The wide publicity about Nasrin across nations within a short span of time deserves closer attention and analysis. To me, there are serious problems with the setting up or targeting, by the Western press, of Nasrin as a symbol of freedom of expression and of women's rights. The way the Western press has presented her and the whole issue is inherently misleading for a variety of reasons: (i) it presents Bangladesh as a uni-dimensional theocracy; (ii) it ignores a complex history of colonial and post-colonial legacies and the divisive politics of the sub-continent; (iii) it overlooks the long and rich history of women's rights and human rights activists and the skepticism with which feminists view her "cause" in Bangladesh.

I argue in this paper that a combination of

colonial and post-colonial legacies and divisive politics in the sub-continent (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) presented Nasrin to the West as an ardent advocate of women's rights, a lone fighter against religious fundamentalism - particularly Islamic fundamentalism. First, I explore post-colonial, transnational, feminist discourses in the context of religious fundamentalism, communalism,[5] and feminist issues in South Asia, particularly Bangladesh and India. Second, I introduce Nasrin's case through her writings, then describe the publication of her novel, *Lajja*,[6] and look at subsequent events along religious, socio-political, and transnational lines. Third, I explore the role of the international media in creating Nasrin as a champion of anti-Islam and presenting her as the sole feminist in Bangladesh. Fourth, I outline the complexities of communal, as well as state, politics in the sub-continent, the geo-political history of Bangladesh, and the activities of post-colonial and transnational social forces. Finally, I look at the actions of women's groups around the Nasrin issue.

FEMINIST THEORIZING: POST-COLONIAL AND TRANSNATIONAL ISSUES

During the British colonial rule and the national independence movements in the sub-continent, religion was used as a powerful weapon by both Hindu and Muslim leadership against each other and against the British. The independence movement created a vision for social justice and democracy, promising to provide full rights to religious minorities and women. However, the post-colonial nation-states of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan quickly consolidated their geographical and political power, leading ultimately to the birth of religious revivalism. Since 1990, there has been an alarming spread of religious fundamentalism across nations in South Asia. The demolition of the Babri mosque in India in 1992[7] and the ensuing massacre of Muslim minorities in several states of India, as well as atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh and Pakistan, reflect the continuing politics of communalism in post-colonial states (Hossain 1995; Sarkar and Butalia 1995; Jayawardena and De Alwis 1996).

I agree with Jayawardena and De Alwis (1996), who state that while national liberation struggles were often positive for women, post-colonial nationalism in South Asia "took on a chauvinist hue, tinged with misogyny" (xii). As a result, violence and atrocities against women - for example, *sati* and dowry deaths in India, acid burning, rape, trafficking in women in Bangladesh - are still on the rise (Ashworth 1995; Zaman 1998). How is religious fundamentalism juxtaposed with the rise in violence against women in contemporary South Asian societies? Sangari and Vaid argue:

> ... far from enjoying the benefits of so-called development, the majority of women have in fact been pushed to the margins of the production process. Alongside this "invisible" economic process, there is a visible escalation of communal conflicts and an increasing politicization of "religious" identities. These later developments have given a new lease of life to patriarchal practices under "religious" sanction. (1989, 2)

In their recent work on feminist genealogies, Alexander and Mohanty (1997) favour taking a "local feminist praxis," but suggest that "we also need to understand the relation to larger, cross-national processes" (xix). Looking at the communal revivalism and the violence against women in Bangladesh and India, one can find transnational processes involving politics and religion influencing every level of social existence. The case of Taslima Nasrin can perhaps be better understood in this transnational context, and I develop this later in the paper. An analysis of transnational geo-politics is convenient for a number of purposes - it acknowledges "a purely locational politics of global-local;" it cross-cuts national boundaries; and persuasively challenges the construction of "inadequate and inaccurate binary and divisions" (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 13). As Grewal and Kaplan convincingly argue:

> Transnational linkages influence every level of social existence. Thus the effects of configurations of practices at those levels are varied and historically specific. (1994, 13)

NASRIN AS A WRITER, POET AND COLUMNIST

Taslima Nasrin, a Bangladeshi physician, has been writing on women's issues since the 1980s. Between 1989 and 1994, she authored nineteen books and wrote columns for various local daily and weekly newspapers. Of the books, seven were novels, one was a collection of short stories, seven were collections of poems, and four were volumes of articles previously published as newspaper columns. Her straightforward and provocative style made her well known and controversial in Bangladesh. For example, her book, *Nirbachita Kolam (Selected Writings)*, was on the best-seller list in Bangladesh and more than 100,000 copies were sold in 1992.

Typically, Nasrin's writings attack the status quo, religion, and men as agents of oppression. A recurrent theme in her writing is sexual discrimination and violence prevalent against women in Bangladesh. She uses graphic language to express herself and to depict the situation of women in the country. In 1993, J. P. Das translated some examples from *Nirbachita Kolam*. Here is one example:

> A lucky man's wife dies, an unlucky man's cattle dies. ... If your wife dies, you can get another wife. But if you lose your cattle, you do not get free cattle. For new cattle you have to pay hard cash, whereas a new wife brings some cash. In such a situation, you can neglect your wife, but you should never neglect your cattle. (Das 1993, 28)

Her analogy between the status of a wife and the status of an animal is symbolic, and it narrates explicitly the discrimination against women and their subordination in the family structure as well as in the society.

Most of Nasrin's writings are grounded in her own and others' experience within the context of wider social life, and she juxtaposes personal and larger social issues. For instance, by recollecting and rearticulating her own/other people's memories, Nasrin exposes the brutality of the Pakistani army which violated women's minds and bodies during the Liberation War. These crimes were never brought to the International War Crime Tribunal System for various geo-political reasons. In the following extract translated by writer Shamsul Islam, Nasrin does not write down her own war story, but reconstructs someone else's to show the pervasiveness of violence against women - and the consequences:

> Of my three maternal uncles involved in the freedom struggle only two returned from the camp after sixteen days of captivity. Of our neighbours who were part of the struggle, some lost their arms while others lost their legs. Still, all relatives and near ones were thrilled to have these people back. However, nobody wanted my aunt to return, as if they would be happier in her absence ... for sixteen continuous days my aunt was locked up in a dark cell and repeatedly raped by ten lustful pro-Pakistani male animals. Our society is not proud of such aunts. ... Each one of us has accepted the damages of war, the gruesome torture inflicted by boots and rifle butts, even the horrors of death. But we have not accepted the accidents [sic] called rape ... my aunt, to protect herself from further shame and disrespect, hanged herself from the ceiling fan. (Islam 1994, 20)

In reconstructing her aunt's story, Nasrin brings to the surface the consequence of being a woman in Bangladesh and the polarization of shame and honour along gender lines. In the introduction to their book about embodied violence in South Asia, Jayawardena and De Alwis echo Nasrin's views:

> Women are seen to be the repository of tradition and their "inviolability" has been a powerful tool of cultural defence against modernisations and westernisation. Nonetheless the control of women's bodies as the symbolic space of the nation has often involved women's oppression. (1996, xv)

Like the above two stories, many of Nasrin's stories transcend national boundaries and present feminist as well as transnational issues. She clearly makes links between women's oppression and exploitation, violence against women and socially sanctioned silence.

Nasrin's concerns encompass multiple layers of women's oppression. Her fight is for freeing women's minds and bodies from men's control. In another extract from *Nirbachito Kolam*, she states :

> Look, they come to bite you, taste you, tear you; they are another name for death. They are another name for savagery and they come to drink you up, lick you up, smash you up. They are men. They are not human .... (Das 1993, 28)

In a poem translated by Alam, "Women Can't," Nasrin repeats the message:

> Any man can unhesitatingly become exultant
> By touching and kneading
> Any woman's flesh and fat,
> Any man can get heated
> By suddenly opening up any woman from top to bottom...
> Only animals and men can
> Touch a body of flesh
> Without love.
> Women can't. (1994, 367)

Nasrin's personal experiences - for example, as a nine-year-old seeing soldiers raping women, including some of her friends - are reflected in the gross generalizations she makes about men. Anger laces Nasrin's writings, and her anger is mostly directed against men. The anger and bitterness is evident in "Enjoying a Woman:"

> What all you'll get
> in this beautiful body,
> you will also get in a full-time wife,
> in half a dozen office girls
> and in cheap harlots ... .
> And since I know that
> before you can spit on my body
> I spit twice over into your aberrant mind.
> (Das 1994, 19)

From her writings, one may assume that she hates men. As Weaver comments about Nasrin, however, "She frequently professes to hate men, yet she has always surrounded herself with them" (1994, 48). Claiming that she is an advocate for both sexes, Nasrin rejects outright her public image as a hard-hitting feminist and man-hater: "I am just an advocate of humanity, and of equal rights for both men and women" (Amin 1993). Nasrin as a writer breaks down stereotyped gender relations as well as sex roles, and challenges male chauvinism in unconventional ways. For example, in her poem, "Other Way Round," she uses reversed role-playing to ridicule society's norms:

> I notice a man buying a woman at Ramna Park
> I would like to buy a man!
> Clean shaved, clean shirt, groomed hair sitting on a park bench,
> Or standing lazily at a street corner,
> I would bargain him for five or ten Taka a time.
>
> I would then pull him up by the collar on my rickshaw,
> Tickle him to giggle,
> Bring him to my room,
> Take my high-heeled shoe
> To beat him up at my pleasure,
> And tell him, 'Piss off!'...
> I would like to buy a man.
> (Alam 1993, 30)

Reversed role-playing ridicules society's norms, breaks down stereotyped gender relations as well as sex roles, and challenges male chauvinism in an unconventional way.

One frequent topic in Nasrin's writings is women's bodies - a taboo subject in Bangladesh society where there is silence about women's bodies and related issues. Contemporary women's groups in Bangladesh have demanded control over women's bodies only in the area of reproductive rights and have fought against capitalist/imperialist aggressions to control women's bodies through population control measures (Akhter 1992). Issues like marital rape, incest, homosexuality, and female orgasm are taboo subjects and are considered firmly beyond social issues. Nasrin's vivid descriptions of women's physical anatomy and her narrations on the issue of incest challenge the norms of Bangladesh. Riaz considers Nasrin's explicit description of woman's physical anatomy as a form of breaking the structured silence (1995). It is the last topic most Bangladeshi women would share in the public arena. As reported by Weaver, Nasrin argues:

> Why shouldn't I write about what I've seen? I'm a doctor ... . To see the ruptured vaginas of women who've been raped? The six- and seven-year-olds who have been violated by their fathers, brothers, and uncles - by their own families. (1994, 14)

Beyond doubt, Nasrin is a strong proponent of freeing women's bodies from male aggression. Her central argument as I have translated it is: "Any really healthy, brilliant woman will be seen as bad" (Nasrin 1993, preface). According to Chowdhury and Chowdhury, Nasrin's work comes close to that of some Western feminists like Erica Jong (*Fear of Flying*) and Naomi Wolfe (*The Beauty Myth*), both of whom have been attacked in the West as pornographers (1994, 8). In Bangladesh, certainly many label Nasrin's work as pornography. Others, however, focus on the issues she raises. For example, Siddiqui (1997) describes Nasrin as "a relentless campaigner of the cause" and compares her with the rebel poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, who turned his anger against the British colonial forces through poems and writings and consequently was imprisoned. Similarly, Nasrin, for her writings, has been exiled.

PUBLICATION OF *LAJJA* AND SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

Lajja is perhaps not her best work, but Nasrin gained international recognition after she published the novel in February 1993. Although *Lajja* was a short and hurriedly written novel, it became a best-seller in both Bangladesh and India. Through *Lajja*, Nasrin also quickly became entangled with volatile communal politics in Bangladesh and India.

Lajja depicts the plight of a fictional Hindu family in Dhaka, in the wake of communal violence that erupted in the city after the destruction of the Babri mosque by Hindu fundamentalists in December 1992. It is the story of a young, progressive Hindu man (Suranjan) in Bangladesh. His sister has been kidnapped by Muslim fanatics during the communal riots that spilled over from the Babri mosque, and Suranjan takes his revenge on a Muslim prostitute. Later on, the family decides to leave Bangladesh for India. The book received mixed reactions. Liberal intellectuals in Bangladesh considered *Lajja* a second-class literary work. Other people said that it publicized the situation of Hindus - a religious minority in Bangladesh. Still others considered it as provocative - distorting and defaming the pervasive secular forces in contemporary Bangladesh. Hindu fundamentalist parties in India (especially the Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]) used the book to further their political cause and distributed free copies of an unauthorized translation all over India. As Shamsul Islam remarks:

> The official organ of Hindu communal politics, a weekly magazine, printed *Lajja* shamelessly and deleted those parts of the novel which held the Hindu communal parties of India responsible for provoking the Muslim fundamentalists of

Bangladesh. (1994, 20)

In addition, the "Indo-phobic" quarter in Bangladesh propagated the rumour that Nasrin had received a huge amount of money from BJP to write the book and destabilize communal harmony in Bangladesh (Riaz 1995).

Nasrin's writings about religion, sexual freedom, and religious *pirs* (teachers) in Islam and her treatment of explicit sex had already angered Bangladeshi *mullahs* (religious clerics). After the publication of *Lajja* and its reception in India, Nasrin began to receive anonymous letters, death threats, and phone calls. In February 1992, at the Bookfair in Dhaka, angry mobs attacked bookstores that carried her books. The deliberate campaign against Nasrin added more fuel to the mullahs' anger and, in the fall of 1993, a previously unknown fundamentalist group named Shahaba Sainik Parishad in Bangladesh issued a fatwa and put a bounty on Nasrin's head. The group demanded both that a ban be placed on all her books and that she be put on trial for blasphemy. As a result, *Lajja* was banned by the government of Bangladesh on the grounds that it might prove the Indo-phobic rumours true and destabilize communal harmony in the country.

Events took a dramatic turn in early May 1994. After attending a human rights conference in Paris, on her way back to Bangladesh, Nasrin visited Calcutta and was interviewed by Sujata Sen, a reporter for the *Statesman*, a local English daily. In the published report, Sen quoted Nasrin as saying that "the Quran was written by a human being" and it "should be revised thoroughly" (Riaz 1995; Wright 1994). Nasrin later refuted the statement and stated, "the misquotation was due to the inexperience of the non-Muslim female reporter of the *Statesman*" (Wright 1994, 20). Nasrin added that she promoted change to the Sharia, the texts of Islamic law, but not to the Koran. She issued the following clarification as reported in a journal:

> I hold the Koran, the Vedas, and the Bible and all such religious texts determining the lives of their followers as out of place and out of time. We have crossed the social-historical contexts in which these were written and therefore, we should not be guided by their precepts; the question of revising thoroughly or otherwise is irrelevant. We have to move beyond these ancient texts if we want to progress. (*Women and Revolution* 1994-1995, 14)

After the interview, the fundamentalists in Bangladesh launched a campaign against Nasrin, particularly the mullahs, who formed a Taslima Nasrin Peshan Committee (Committee to Grind Down Taslima Nasrin). To save herself from death threats and to avoid arrest, Nasrin went into hiding. On July 29, 1994, nearly 200,000 Islamic fundamentalists marched through the streets of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, demanding Nasrin's death (*Women and Revolution* 1994-1995, 14). The fundamentalists repeatedly protested in the streets of Dhaka and other major cities, demanding Nasrin's trial on charges of blasphemy. On the basis of an age-old law drawn up by the British colonial government, the Bangladesh government finally laid charges against Nasrin and a no-bail warrant was issued for her arrest. Under this law, anyone offending religious sentiments may be punished by up to two years in prison. Meanwhile, negotiations were going on between Nasrin's legal advisors (such as Dr. Kamal Hossain, a renowned lawyer in the country), Western ambassadors (Sweden, Norway, United States, France and Germany), the Women Writers' Committee of PEN (International Writers Group) and representatives of the Bangladesh government. Finally, Bangladesh, an aid-dependent country, had no choice but to comply with the demands of the donor countries. Nasrin was granted bail and allowed to leave on August 9, 1994, for Stockholm, Sweden.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

The Western media presented its coverage of the proposed trial of Taslima Nasrin and her fleeing from Bangladesh to Sweden in a melodramatic way - Bangladesh was an Islamic theocracy, and Nasrin was anti-Islam and the sole feminist speaking out against religious

fundamentalism, women's oppression, and patriarchal structures of the society. To capture the flavour of Western media publicity, one only has to look at newspapers and magazines between 1993 and 1995, the time when international controversy about Nasrin was at its height. The front page of a journal was titled, "Islamic Fundamentalists Vow to Kill Woman Writer" (*Women and Revolution* 1994-1995, 14). The *Observer* (London, England) in its World News column reported, "Bangladeshi [sic] call to hang 'female Salman Rushdie'" (MacWilliam, July 3, 1994, 21). The *Globe and Mail* in Toronto claimed, "Fundamentalists continue to call for Nasrin's death," and "Exiled author longs for home: Writer who fled Bangladesh to escape Islamic extremists has become an international symbol" (August 31, 1994; Leeman, February 18, 1995). The *Vancouver Sun* announced, "Police hunt for Muslim novelist over 'insult'" (June 6, 1994). *Outlook* reported, "Sentenced to Death" (March, 1995). *Maclean's* magazine published a feature titled, "Fighting words: A poet forced into hiding by Muslim extremists still speaks out for oppressed women" (Morris 1995, 44). As Carolyne Wright pointed out:

> Compelling photos in the *New York Times* have shown Bangladeshi women clad in burqah and veil, as if Bangladesh were an Iranian-style Islamic theocracy - when in reality very few women dress so severely. (1994, 21)

As these headlines show, the Western media were anxious to portray themselves as secular and democratic. There was no rigorous analysis of the Nasrin affair in the context of transnational politics, inter-communal violence, colonial legacies or the role of the state in consolidating power in the sub-continent. The Western media's treatment of Nasrin ignored the strengths of existing feminist groups and of the secular forces which had a long historical tradition in Bangladesh. Ajit Bhattacharjea, a political analyst, commented:

> The Hindu minority of some 25 million was able to stay on despite communal reactions to events in India. The tradition of tolerance, with its strong Sufi and pre-Islamic roots survived, especially among the intellectuals. Pride in the Bengali language and culture grew, to the extent that anniversaries related to Rabindranath Tagore were celebrated with more enthusiasm than in West Bengal. Women play a role in society and politics that orthodox mullahs would not approve. (1994, 8)

Ironically, Nasrin's work prior to *Lajja* was limited to women's rights and discrimination against women in a local context. Both the publication of *Lajja* with its wide publicity in India as a champion of anti-communalism in Bangladesh and the complexities of geo-politics in the Indian sub-continent placed Nasrin in the international arena. Nasrin's own actions and attitudes towards the mullahs also helped the situation deteriorate. As Carolyne Wright remarked:

> Taslima Nasreen appeared to enjoy taking even more confrontational stances. At times, she even appeared to taunt her enemies, smoking a cigarette while handling the Koran in a BBC television feature filmed before she went into hiding. (1994, 21)

The Western media's portrayal of Nasrin as a champion of anti-Islam not only helped the political situation to deteriorate further, but also took away her support at the grass-roots level. It is a fact that the majority of Bangladeshis are Muslims, but not fundamentalist in the traditional sense. Indeed, there is a strong secular trend in Bangladesh politics and culture. For instance, the leftist/liberal forces, many students, and various women's groups fought side by side relentlessly from 1952 to 1971 to free Bangladesh from the military-bureaucratic neo-colonial complex of Pakistan. Partha Ghosh, Director at the Indian Council of Social Science Research, remarked, "Bangladesh is typical of South Asian politics

where religion is used for political purposes yet secularist forces also remain vigilant and strong" (1993, 709). Throughout the Nasrin controversy, the Western media did not explore the activities of either leftist/liberal forces or feminist/women's groups, and in its ignorance, overlooked these other contemporary forces. They painted a negative image of Bangladesh, where religious fundamentalists issue and execute fatwas and Bangladeshi women are passive victims, helpless in their daily lives. In fact, liberal and secular forces were strong in the socio-political processes in Bangladesh. The 1996 general election demonstrated again how strong these forces were when all religious parties were rejected outright by the voters in favour of secular democratic parties. The Western media image of Bangladesh as a uni-dimensional Islamic theocracy was totally misleading and false.

TRANSNATIONAL POLITICS IN THE SUB-CONTINENT AND THE ROLE OF THE POST-COLONIAL STATES IN THE NASRIN AFFAIR

To comprehend the Nasrin affair in the context of religion, politics and feminist issues in the sub-continent, one needs to go beyond her case and look at both the local context and the post-colonial socio-political processes crosscutting national boundaries. Since the liberation of Bangladesh, a number of writers have received fatwas as well as death threats from the Islamic fundamentalist parties. Notable among these are Ahmed Sharif, Kabir Chowdhury, Begum Sufia Kamal, and Jahanara Begum, all of whom ignored the death threats and continued with their day-to-day activities as usual. In the case of Begum Sufia Kamal, the 86-year-old poet/writer and life-long activist, even her family members received death threats. Jahanara Imam's book *Ekattorer Dinguli* (translated as *Those Days of 1971*; the English language version is *Of Blood and Fire*) is considered an authentic diary as well as an autobiographical record from a woman's perspective. It vividly documents atrocities of the Pakistani military, its collaborators, and religious fanatics during the Liberation War in 1971. Her son Rumi, a freedom fighter, disappeared after being arrested and tortured by the Pakistani army; her husband was also tortured by the Pakistani army and later on died. With the formation of the Ekatturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee (Co-ordinating Committee for the Elimination of Collaborators and Assassins/Killers of 1971), Jahanara Imam successfully mobilized a mass movement. On March 26, 1992, in its own public court, with the support of a large crowd, the Committee sentenced Golam Azam, the *amir* (leader) of the right-wing religious party JI (Jamaat-i-Islami) to death for war crimes and asked the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) government to carry out the sentence. During the Liberation War, the JI had collaborated with the Pakistani military and had been condemned for its heinous activities. Despite numerous death threats and fatwas, Jahanara Imam pursued her crusade until her death in July 1995. Neither the international media nor Indian feminist groups/media ever paid any attention to her cause of bringing war criminals to trial!

I believe that the Nasrin affair was used by the BNP government to divert public attention from national politics and to create divisions between and among the opposition parties. Since March 1994, the AL (Awami League), the major opposition party, allied with the JD (Jatiyo Dal) and the JI to boycott sessions of Parliament. They pressed forward a number of demands, such as the resignation of the BNP government, and called for a national election under a neutral caretaker government. The alliance between the AL, considered the liberal and secular political party, and the JI, the Islamic religious party, was awkward as the JI had previously supported the BNP. The situation got worse as the opposition parties continuously called for nation-wide strikes and *hartals* (a stoppage of work in protest or boycott) and staged mass rallies and demonstrations (Hossain 1995).

When it was first published in a Calcutta-based newspaper, Nasrin's interview did not receive any publicity in Bangladesh. The BNP government at that time was led by Khaleda Zia in a fragile parliamentary democracy. According to Riaz, a

government-owned newspaper highlighted the interview "to create an environment conducive to filing a case against her" (1995, 25). In other words, the government's strategy was to use the Nasrin issue to diffuse public attention and create divisiveness within the opposition alliance. The government failed to comprehend the political wind and public mood, and eventually the government's strategy consolidated all religious groups - which ultimately formed another alliance to persecute Nasrin. The anti-government mood turned into an anti-Nasrin campaign and several pro-liberal newspaper offices were attacked and ransacked. Since the independence of Bangladesh the religious fundamentalists had never gained such strength publicly! (After the liberation in 1971, the then-AL government led by Sheikh Mujib had banned all political parties based on religion, a ban that was lifted in 1986.)

The BNP government faced a complex political scenario. On the one hand, it risked losing the support of religious fundamentalist groups that had swept the BNP to victory against the Awami League in the 1992 general elections. On the other hand, it faced pressure from Western donor countries - as Weaver commented, "Seemingly overnight, Taslima had become the Western world's symbol of freedom of expression and of women's rights, in opposition to the rise of religious intolerance" (1994, 56).

In India, the Hindu fundamentalist parties, such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), made every effort to use *Lajja* against the Muslims residing in India and used the book to demand the eviction of "illegal" Bangladeshis who were Muslims. As I mentioned earlier, the BJP even printed copies of *Lajja*, but deleted some parts of the novel which held the BJP responsible for provoking the Islamic fundamentalists in Bangladesh. It is clearly evident that the novel was used to strengthen the communal forces and the fundamentalist parties in both India and Bangladesh.

THE ROLE OF FEMINIST/WOMEN'S GROUPS: SUPPORTIVE OR AMBIVALENT?

The beginnings of formal women's organizations in Bangladesh are linked to the Liberation movement. During the mass movement against the military dictatorship of Pakistan in 1969, students, writers, peasants, workers, academics, journalists, and left-oriented women's groups actively participated in demonstrations, protests and marches. This mass movement intensified women's consciousness and resulted in the birth of Mahila Parishad (Women's Council) in 1970, currently Bangladesh's largest women's organization with more than 30,000 members. After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 and the First UN International Women's Conference held in Mexico in 1975, various women's groups emerged to change discriminatory policies towards women and promote gender equity.

Despite the diversity of these women's groups, from time to time they form alliances against the state and all forces of oppression, all of which has made the movement quite visible. For example, the women's groups formed an alliance in 1995 against the brutal rape and murder of a young woman, Yasmin (age twelve), by three policemen and forced the BNP government (led by Khaleda Zia) to take action against the police and local administrators. Without doubt, the women's groups in Bangladesh have strengthened their base and been successful in identifying women's issues as social issues - for example, rape, violence against women and children, women's rights in the workplace, property rights of women, divorce, and child custody.

At the early stages of the Nasrin controversy, liberal forces including writers, journalists, poets, and literary critics applauded Nasrin's boldness and supported her freedom of expression. Intellectuals, activists, journalists, and secularists formed a coalition and supported Nasrin's writings, but her confrontational stances, attacking well-known people personally through her column, and the geo-politics of her book, *Lajja*, cross-cut national boundaries and challenged what

Grewal and Kaplan (1994) call "inadequate and inaccurate binary divisions." Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kari (a non-government organization or NGO) remarked:

> Taslima went for the jugular, and we're not ready for that. There's simply too much at stake. You have to learn how to deal with the situation - how to handle the bearded ones. And that is something that Taslima never understood. (Weaver 1994, 58)

As Nasrin became more and more controversial (Mortaza and Rahman 1994), support for her within Bangladesh declined even more. As Weaver notes, Nasrin commented, "Only a few artists came to visit me when I was living underground. They were fearful and confused - they were cowards" (1994, 58).

Despite the support from international groups, such as Amnesty International, PEN, and the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW), women's groups in Bangladesh were ambivalent towards Nasrin. Her issue put women's groups in an awkward situation. They feared that Nasrin's writings might set off a conservative backlash against the movement, and indeed they did. Fundamentalists attacked various offices, particularly those of women's organizations and NGOs, burned down some NGO-run schools in the rural areas and claimed that the NGOs were anti-state, anti-Islamic organizations.

In spite of their later ambivalence, some feminist/women's groups tried to give Nasrin support. On June 12, 1994, The *Pioneer* - an Indian English daily - reported that some Bangladeshi women's organizations had signed a statement: "The case against Taslima must be withdrawn. It is the mullahs who should be put on trial for committing repression on women through fatwas and unauthorized Islamic courts" (Fazl 1994, 7).

There are three main reasons why Nasrin did not receive spontaneous and unequivocal support from feminist/women's groups. First, she had never been involved with any of the women's groups. In addition, she had never actively participated in any protests or demonstrations pertinent to women's issues. Second, fatwas and death threats had been issued occasionally to writers and poets like Nasrin, but not all reacted as she did. For example, the women's groups, whatever their internal differences, recognized and respected Begum Sufia Kamal, who received fatwas several times, but ignored them and pursued her daily activities as usual. In contrast, in the interview with BBC television, Nasrin smoked a cigarette while holding the Koran and taunted the religious fundamentalists. Through this act in the Western media, Nasrin alienated not only the general public, but also women's groups in Bangladesh.

Third, quite frequently, Nasrin underplayed and underestimated feminists and activists as well as writers (both female and male). This put her on a double edge. In her interview with the *Statesman*, for example, when she was pressed to make remarks about Begum Sufia Kamal and Jahanara Imam - highly acclaimed activists - Nasrin bypassed the question and commented that most women activists are afraid of fundamentalists, are affiliated with a political party and are happy to be "housewives" (Wright 1994, 21). Nasrin's disregard of feminist activists/women's groups either made them angry or forced them to be silent. They continue to be reluctant to be involved with anything related to her.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have discussed the Nasrin case in the context of local and cross-national processes to illustrate how contemporary feminist positions in Bangladesh are influenced by the geo-politics and colonial legacies of Bangladesh and India. The controversy raised by Nasrin drew various local, national and international forces into the fray, which eventually forced her to flee the country. In my opinion, the issue was internationally publicized, not to support feminist causes, but to highlight the rise of fundamentalist forces both in Bangladesh and India. Nasrin was a "pawn" in the political game played out by various forces for political gains. The international focus on Nasrin as a lone fighter against the religious

fundamentalist onslaught avoided questioning or examining colonial legacies, inter-communal politics and violence, the role of the state, and the transnational socio-economic, political processes; it also ignored the strength of the feminist/secular and leftist/writers' groups who had played vital roles during the 1969 popular uprising, the Liberation War of 1971, and the recently held 1996 general election, to name a few.

What about Nasrin and feminism in Bangladesh? Her book, *Lajja*, represented more geo-politics in the subcontinent than feminist views in Bangladesh. Nasrin did break the structural silence of her society on various women's issues, but her writings and her remarks went beyond what feminist/women's groups could support, and may have jeopardized their gains. After Nasrin's exile to Sweden in 1994, her case was not discussed by any feminist/women's groups in a public forum in Bangladesh. Even in the general election of Jatiyo Sangsad in June 1996, no individual or group raised Nasrin's case as an election issue.

Nasrin is still in exile. I hope that this paper stimulates dialogue and interest among feminists as well as activists (Bangladeshi/international) in post-colonial, transnational feminist issues in the sub-continent, especially in Bangladesh and India. The controversy surrounding Nasrin and her exile should not be treated simply as a local or Islamic fundamentalist issue, but as a geo-political, transnational feminist issue.

POSTSCRIPT

Since I completed the final revision of this paper, the Nasrin issue has once again hit the media in Bangladesh and in the West. Nasrin's recent (October 1998) return home sparked riots in the streets of Dhaka, which demonstrates that the religious fundamentalists' hostility against her remains undiminished despite her four years of exile. As I indicated earlier, while some women's groups in Bangladesh support Nasrin, Bangladeshi women's groups in general do not want her return to be an issue that diverts attention from other important women's rights issues: "Our problem is [that] the Western press and the Indian press have been building her [Nasrin] as the only issue," said Khushi Kabir, a leading women's rights activist in Dhaka as reported in *Kinesis* (November 1998). As reported in the *Vancouver Sun* (October 10, 1998), Farida Akhter, a Bangladeshi feminist, said, "Under no circumstances would we agree with the fanatics to cut off her head ... she is responsible for the fact that people are not coming forward to support her. Taslima Nasrin is not a women's movement issue, but an issue created by the international media." These responses provide further support to the general argument presented in this paper.

ENDNOTES

1. The paper is based on my research project, Women's Work and Social Change in Bangladesh, funded by the Simon Fraser University President's Research Grant (January 1996-August 1997).

2. This is an excerpt from my personal communication with Dr. Louise Sweet, former Professor of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, September 22, 1994. Dr. Michèle Pujol, a former colleague of mine in Women's Studies at the University of Victoria, in British Columbia, also motivated me to write this paper. Dr. Pujol organized a lecture, Feminism in Bangladesh, at the University of Victoria (March 22, 1996) and invited me to lecture on the Nasrin issue. While I am solely responsible for the content/analysis of this paper, I sincerely acknowledge Dr. Pujol's contributions in shaping some of my thoughts. The final version of this paper has benefited from comments by peer reviewers, particularly by Dr. Marjorie Griffin Cohen and Dr. Marilyn Porter, editors of *Atlantis*. I am thankful to all of them.

3. Also spelled Nasreen by various authors. I shall use "Nasrin" throughout the paper.

4. Fatwa is considered a religious opinion by clerics and is based on the interpretation of the Koran (the Muslim Holy book) and Sunnah (the teachings and activities of Prophet Mohammed). Religious leaders can deliver fatwas related to interpretation of Muslim rituals/text, but they have no authority to implement fatwa. Further, fatwas do not have any legal sanctions in Bangladesh.

5. "Communalism," which means the act (such as riot), advocacy and subtle, as well as overt, threat of violence along religious lines, is a term widely used in the Indian sub-continent when Hindus and Muslims propagate hatred and act violently against each other.

6. Salman Rushdie had earlier published a book with the same title: *Shame*.

7. Hindu Nationalists in India claimed that the Babri mosque in Ayodhya had been built on the site of the destroyed Ram temple (birthplace of God Ram); hence, on December 6, 1992, they launched a political protest to erect a Ram temple on the site of the Babri mosque. This culminated in the destruction of the Babri mosque by a large group of Hindu fundamentalists. For details, see Partha S. Ghosh, 1997.

SELECTED REFERENCES

Akhter, Farida. *Depopulation of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Narigrantha Prabartana, 1992.

Alam, Fazul. "Fighter Unto Death." *Savvy* (India) (November 1993): 30.

Alexander, M. Jacqui and Chandra T. Mohanty, eds. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

Amin, Aasha Mehereen. "Rebelling the status quo." *The Daily Star* (Nov. 4, 1993).

Ashworth, Georgina, ed. *A Diplomacy of the Oppressed: New Directions in International Feminism*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1995.

"Bangladeshi writer in hiding." *Outlook* (October/November, 1994): 7.

Bhattachrjea, Ajit. "If Taslima is arrested Bangladesh will be on trial." *The Pioneer* (June 16, 1994): 8.

Chowdhury, Kabir and Saikat Chowdhury. "Freeing the woman's body: Central to equality." *The Daily Star* (May 26, 1994): 8.

_____. *Taslima Nasreen and the Issue of Feminism*. Dhaka: Pratyasha Prakashan, 1997.

Das, J.P. "Extracts from *Nirbachita Kalam*." *Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society* 78 (Sept.-Oct. 1993): 28-29.

_____. "Enjoying a Woman." *Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society* 85 (Nov.-Dec. 1994): 19.

Fazl, Ahmed. "A pawn in the political game." *The Pioneer* (June 12, 1994): 7.

"Fundamentalists continue to call for Nasrin's death." *Globe and Mail* (August 31, 1994).

Ghosh, Partha S. "Bangladesh at the crossroads: Religion and politics." *Asian Survey* 33, 2 (July 1993): 697-710.

Grewal, Inderpal and Caren Kaplan, eds. *Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices: Scattered Hegemonies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Hossain, Golam. "Bangladesh in 1994: Democracy at Risk." *Asian Survey* 35, 2 (Feb. 1995): 171-78.

Islam, Shamsul. "The many-faceted struggle of Taslima Nasreen." *Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society* 85 (Nov.-Dec. 1994): 18-25.

"Islamic fundamentalists vow to kill woman writer: Defend Taslima Nasrin!" *Women and Revolution* 44 (Winter 1994-Spring 1995): 12-21.

Jayawardena, Kumari and Malathi De Alwis, eds. *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*. London & New Jersey: Zed Book, 1996.

Leeman, Sue. "Exiled author longs for home: Writer who fled Bangladesh to escape Islamic extremists has become an international symbol." *The Globe and Mail* (February 18, 1995).

MacWilliam, Ian. "Bangladeshi call to hang 'female Salman Rushdie.'" *The Observer* (London, England) (July 3, 1994): 21.

Morris, Nomi. "Fighting words: A poet forced into hiding by muslim extremists still speaks out for oppressed women." *Maclean's* (October 9, 1995): 44.

Mortaza, Golam and Kazi Mustafizur Rahman, eds. *Naribad, Samprodayikata o Taslima Nasrin* [Feminism, Communalism and Taslima Nasrin]. Dhaka: Barnayan, 1994.

Nasrin, Taslima. *Nasta Meyer Nasta Gadya* [Bad Girl's Bad Stories]. Calcutta: Anand Publishers, 1993.

Nasrin, Taslima. "The Wheel." Trans. by Fazul Alam. In *Infinite Variety: Women in Society and Literature*. Edited by Firdous Azim and Niaz Zaman. Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1994: 367-68.

"Police hunt for Muslim novelist over 'insult.'" *Vancouver Sun* (June 6, 1994).

Riaz, Ali. "Taslima Nasrin: Breaking the structured silence." *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 27, 1 (January-March, 1995): 21-27.

Sangari, Kumkum and Sudesh Vaid, eds. *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989.

Sarkar, Tanika and Urvashi Butalia, eds. *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995.

Siddiqui, Zillur Rahman. "Foreword." In *Taslima Nasreen and the Issue of Feminism*. By Kabir Chowdhury and Saikat Chowdhury. Dhaka: Pratyasha Prakashan, 1997.

Stockholm, John. "In defence of the extreme." *The Globe and Mail* (June 13, 1994).

Weaver, Mary Anne. "A fugitive from injustice." *The New Yorker* (September 12, 1994): 48-60.

Wright, Carolyne. "Diary." *London Review of Books* (September 8, 1994): 20-21.

Zaman, Habiba. *Patriarchy and Purdah: Structural and Systemic Violence against Women in Bangladesh*. Uppsala, Sweden: Life & Peace Institute, 1998.

Janapriya Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies (Jjis)
[A Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal; Indexed in NepJOL]
ISSN: 2362-1516 (Print), ISSN: 2773-8000 (Online)
Published by Janapriya Research and Consultancy Center (JRCC)
Janapriya Multiple Campus, Pokhara
Journal Homepage: www.janapriya.edu.np

Rhetorical Analysis of Women's Status and Social Injustice in Taslima Nasrin's Speech and Interview

Ganga Ram Paudyal
Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara

Article History : *Submitted 22 Jun. 2022; Reviewed 13 Aug. 2022; Accepted 26 Nov. 2022*
Corresponding Author : *Ganga Ram Paudyal,* ***Email :*** *grampoudel@gmail.com*
DOI : *10.3126/jjis.v11i1.53909*

Abstract

This paper explores Taslima Nasrin in terms of the issues related to women's status, freedom of expression, secularism, and religious fanaticism, using her speeches and interviews. She opposes ritual practices of Islam in particular and all religions in general, which limit women's rights and freedom of expression. She herself has become the victim of the subjugation due to her revolutionary ideas for the empowerment of women. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to find how women are marginalized in multiple ways by religious practices that have created problems in societies, making a division among the fanatical people. She shows how religion and patriarchy have been trying to dominate women without advocating for freedom and equality. Secularism and dogmatic ideas have caused the segregation of women. Her emphasis is on the reformation of those narrow concepts. Based on her interviews and speeches, rhetorical analysis is made regarding the status of women in Islamic countries and religious fundamentalism. This paper applies descriptive method to make analysis of her speeches and interviews which are the primary source of the concepts. The finding refers to take collective effort for the liberation and empowerment of women. Speeches and writings can best be used to persuade people for the status of women and reformation in the society.

Keywords: Fundamentalism, injustice, patriarchy, secularism, suppression, women's status

Copyright 2022 © the Author(s) and the Publisher
Janapriya Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies (Jjis), Vol. XI (Special Issue), Dec. 2022 [pp. 33 - 43]

Introduction

Taslima Nasrin is a revolutionary Bangladeshi writer, critic, and physician who is against female domination and injustice. From her childhood, she had been encouraged by her father to look into the issues critically. After she grew older, she broke away not only from religion, but also from all customs thinking that they constantly suppressed, oppressed, and degenerated women and the people in minority. Similarly, women in her society have been dominated and discriminated in many ways making them inferior without freedom of expression. Many people either laymen or scholars from both the east and west regard that Islam and feminism have extreme negative correlations, because Islam is supposed to have sanctioned polygamy and an inferior status to women in comparison to men in all spheres of life. Due to such partitions, many Hindus and Muslims were made homeless and were forced to leave their permanent homeland. The leaders of those places were unable to find the evil design of the emperors and there was birth of Bangladesh on the basis of religion from Pakistan. For the struggle emergent these days, there is a connection with the exploiters of West Pakistan in the name of religion. Even copying the idea from the British manly West Pakistani rulers, mainly Muslim fundamentalists tried to divide and rule the people of Bangladesh uprooting their mixed culture and imposing Islamic fashion of language.

From her oratory skill, Nasrin tries to establish her position as a critic who has the right to criticize the injustice activities going on in the society either on the basis of religion or superiority of male. In her speech of March 2018, she opines as, "Like religious people have the right to express their religious views, I should also have the right to express my non-religious views. And I should not be killed for that ("The Quint," 00:00:01-00:00.12)." She strongly denies about supporting violence, and she is ready to leave India where she is staying temporarily if she has to make accommodation with injustice. In this regard, she again stands her position as a person advocating for women's freedom and in an interview on CNN she says as, "I have a dream. I dream of a beautiful world where women would be no oppressed ("itvindia," 00:00:32-00:00:40)." She also has reservation about religion and she says, "If any religion keeps people in ignorance, if any religion allows the people to prosecute other people of different faith and if any religion keeps women in slavery then I cannot accept that religion ("itvindia," 00:02:05 -00:02.25)." Relating how she was forced to leave the place where she was born and how she has become victim of its poverty, faith, migration, partition, violence and even theory of nationhood. Her views on religion are also revolutionary, and she says that any religion in the world should not keep people in ignorant. Mainly, she opposes Islam and the ideas in the Quran that they have

no boarder outlook as they promote violence and injustice. She points out that due to Islamic religion women do not get equal opportunity as men and they do not get property. She criticizes all world religions as they oppress women and she becomes sceptic to all religions. Not only the fundamentalists but religion itself is against women which only promotes male values. Her works cover a wide range of genres, such as newspaper columns, poetry, and popular novels in which she strongly opposes injustices of any kind.

The main cause of Nasrin's shifts to women's issues and against religion was her own experience of sexual abuse in her adolescence period and her work of a gynecologist. In another speech she opines about Islam as, "Islam does not consider women to be separate human beings, manage the original creation and womankind is created secondarily for the pleasure of men. Islam considers women as slaves or sexual objects, nothing else. Women's role is to stay at home and to obey husband. ("Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc.," 00:10:55-00:11:14)." Her ideas are for the support of feminism and she also talks about marriage in which only protection of men and women are made run after their husbands. Quran gives total freedom to men and considers women psychologically inferior. Even in case of rape Islamic laws are not favourable because they demand four male witnesses. Women were charged for adultery but women have no right to charge their husbands for the similar manner. For the conflict going on in the societies also she considers it between rational, logical thinking versus irrational, illogical thinking. She is so determined to continue what she has done as she has no regret what she has done so far. She would continue her struggle against all the extremists, fundamentalists and intolerant forces without any compromise until her death. This paper tries to seek persuasive matter in Nasreen's works using ethos, logos, pathos and rhetoric of women's writing as theoretical tools. The aim is to investigate how she rhetorically positions herself and tries to reach out to the audience with her promises of change in both society and religion. A rhetorical analytical perspective contributes to a more profound understanding of how she talks about Islam, women's issues and religious fanatics in her speeches, interviews and writings. It addresses the problems concerning the status women, change in religious practices and liberation and empowerment of Muslim women.

Rhetoric: Theory and Practice

Ordinary people use it either at random or through practice and from acquired habit whereas learned men use it by knowledge and skills more tactfully than the ordinary people. About the origin of rhetoric, Richard Leo Enos says, "Rhetoric did not originate at a single moment in history. Rather, it was an evolving, developing consciousness about the relationship

between thought and expression" (cited in Herrick 31). From this point of view, it can be asserted that by regular practice of human communication the theory of rhetoric evolved. Through some planning and for accomplishing their goals people began to use rhetoric. Before Greek people used powerful language to persuade the audience and systematically it emerged from the period of ancient Greece. Basically, rhetoric presents a small portion of the art of persuasion. Rhetoric sometimes seems as similar with discourse and it used interchangeably with ideology and concerned with the notion of power. It has both positive and negative aspects and the audience should be conscious of it detecting both aspects. In this regard, George A Kennedy includes as:

> There are dangers in rhetoric—political extremism, racism, and unscrupulous sales techniques, for example—but by studying rhetoric we can become alert to its potential for misuse and learn to recognize when a speaker is seeking to manipulate us. There is great positive power in rhetoric as well, which we can use for valid ends. (x)

Thus, people need to learn it from being cheated being able to decipher what is true and what is not. It is also related with how language and other symbolic forms influence the way the audiences think, feel or act along with discourse. Rhetorical analysis can assist to understand some of the reasons for the underlying discourse people make.

Ethos is a Greek word that means reliability, credibility, custom and habit. It is basically an appeal for the speaker's authority or honesty. In other words, it can be called the moral ownership of the speaker in the eyes of the listener. With the help of ethos, the speaker assures the listener that he has such good knowledge and moral credibility that the speakers of a particular subject can address in many ways. Being an important or eminent person, the speaker uses effective arguments to the listener and tries to establish himself a knowledgeable person of the subject by appealing to the morality or character of a person. In this connection, Ulku D Demirdogen states, "Ethos, was the first element in his theory of persuasion, which referred to the character the speaker wished to present. It could be defined as the charisma and the credibility of the speaker" (191). Ethos reflects the ability of the speaker in convincing the listener and depends on how much the listener trusts the speaker and how much the speaker is trustworthy for the listener.

Pathos another proof suggested by Aristotle is mainly concerned with reason that appeals to the passions or the will of the audience. In this regard, Ulku D. Demirdogen writes about pathos as, "Aristotle's appeals to pathos are psychological appeals as they rely on the receiver's emotions… an ability or skill which might be called as empathy or emotional intelligence in

contemporary terms"(192). It means some virtues like justice, generosity, courage, gentleness and wisdom are also involved with pathos or appeals to emotion. Any speaker tries to impress his/her audience by argument as pathos is mainly concerned with the audiences. The role of audiences cannot be ignored in communication. By pathos the speaker is able to impose his/her message by appealing emotion of the audience.

Logos is the situation of considering the context by the speaker to appeal the intellect or reason. It depends on how the audiences process information in logical ways by the behavior of the speaker. Aristotle advised the speakers to use enthymemes in which the major premise was already believed by the audience and logically ideas can be presented. In this connection, Tamar Mshvenieradze opines about logos as, "Logos is a very important for argumentative judgment as one of the dimensions of persuasion. Logos means persuading by the use of reasoning which includes critical cognition, analytical skills, good memory, and purposeful behavior, which is the most important argumentation. For Aristotle Logos is rationale, logical and argumentative discourse" (1939). Mainly, logos is concerned with the emotion of the speaker. To influence the audiences by this/her appeal, the speaker needs to assess the patterns of information processing and can persuade them.

Rhetoric of Women's Writings and Nasrin's Motif for Social Change

The rhetoric of women's writings is concerned with the issues of gender, class, language, literature and culture demanding equal justice, freedom and opportunities. Feminist promotion determines tensions knitted deep into the fabric of our society and incites an unusually extreme and insightful rhetoric of moral conflict. The status of women is determined primarily by birth, and their social position is at odds with fundamental democratic values. Regarding the feminist rhetoric, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell mentions as, "Consequently, feminist rhetoric is substantively unique by definition, because no matter how traditional its argumentation, how justificatory its form, how discursive its method, or how scholarly its style, it attacks the entire psychosocial reality, the most fundamental values, of the cultural context in which it occurs" (75). Women's issues are not only related with the visible problems faced by women but also with the reformation of all psychological problems women are facing. The rhetoric of women's writing emphasizes the participation of women in dialogue, self-revelation and self-criticism, decision making through self-persuasion, and the strategic use of techniques for violating the reality structure for the process of making women's writing a separate genre of rhetoric. In this regard, Helene Cixous et al. emphasize as, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as

violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement" (875). Women's writing is a unified, separate and radical genre of rhetoric with distinctive substantive-stylistic features. Women are prompted to write that stands for a supplier of sexual urge and drive for creativity. For creativity their bodies are the basis and by exploring their own bodies they can reform male centred beliefs, language, values, and norms.

Nasrin claims that she wants to change the society making women aware about their rights without accepting religious laws and patriarchal system. She has written many genres, such as newspaper columns, poetry, and popular novels and has generated unprecedented reactions against her opinions. She was blamed as a traitor appointed by imperial forces to criticize Islam and fundamentalists demanded for her execution. Such threats made her leave her medical practice and become a full-time writer and activist as a fatwa was issued against. She also learnt more about women's problems from her own experience of sexual abuse in her adolescence period and her work as a gynecologist. She also supported the banishment of the burka in 2019, by the government of Sri Lanka as an expression of women's freedom. Again she opines for the rights of women and people in minority addressing the world to pay attention to these problems as, "The world is constantly vigilant that no one hears the sentiment of those who are opposed to human rights and women's rights. When will the world learn to stop pleasing the extremists and begin to respect reason and humanism instead ("India Foundation," 00:12:07- 00:12:23)." Her ideas are for drawing the attention of the world to be conscious about the issues raised by her. She thinks that the world is guided more by power not by intellect and reason. For the conflict going on in the societies also she considers it between traditional ideas versus modern and scientific thoughts. She does not have any feeling of regret for what she has done so far. She is fully determined to continue her struggle against all the extremists, fundamentalists and intolerant forces without any compromise until her death.

From her speeches, Nasreen tries to prove her as an atheist, feminist writer and human right activist who is always in favour of the people in minority and oppressed. She also opines that religion should favour peace and if it promotes violence it needs to be reformed. She points out many verses in the Quran which motivate Muslims to kill others such as non-believers and non-Muslims. This way, Islam is promoting violence, terror and intolerance. In an interview regarding terror attack in Bangladesh she says, "There is no peace in Islam. You would find lots of violence and intolerance in Islam. You know Islam is not comfortable with human rights, women's rights, democracy and freedom of expression ("India Today," 00:03:09-00:03:24)."

She further shows the connection of Islam with many terrorist organizations and taking the reference of Islamic verses they are killing non-believers. As she says, "Those ISIL, Boko Haram, and other terrorist organizations cite Quranic texts that most Muslims think that they are secret. Actually, you know those ISIL, Boko Haram, and other terrorist organizations that they say that Islam urges us to kill non-believers. So they are killing non-believers ("India Today," 00:03:26-00:03:57)." She points out that Islamic religion does not provide equal opportunities to women as men. She criticizes all world religions as they are all anti women and they are made for men. Not only the fundamentalists but religion itself is against women. Without making object on the belief of some people, she opposes the practice of religion because it is against humanism, human rights, women's rights, and freedom of expression.

Ethos, Pathos, and Logos in Nasrin's Ideas

Nasrin criticizes religious fundamentalism that is going on in Bangladesh which oppresses, suppresses and degenerates women. She uses rhetoric in her writing, speeches and interviews to persuade the audience in order to draw their attention to her views. The concentration of her interviews, writings and speeches is accomplished with the appeal of her interviews, writings and speeches with ethos, pathos and logos and her delivery styles. Persuasion, as a part of ethos, is used to impress the listener to take appropriate action or to support a specific point of view in spoken and written communication by the speaker. Referring the idea of Aristotle related to the art persuasion and the ability to find it, Tamar Mshvenieradze clarifies about as, "The greatest scientist proved that the rhetoric method was the" art of persuasion" thus "the ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion"(1939).The speaker or writer can use facts and logical reasoning, emotions and their character, authority and credibility to influence the listener. By the writings, speeches and interviews she is acclaimed as a writer who promoted the women in the Third World. In this regard, Bishnupriya Ghosh writes as, "Nasrin becomes a "subaltern" figure in both Western and Third World discourses and even in feminist attempts to champion her cause" (41). She is able to draw global attention by raising voices against injustices. She is not only known as a feminist writer but also a social activist.

Nasrin claims herself as atheist, secular humanist and a feminist writer who always supports oppressed people. She has been living in exile due to her opposing ideas about Muslim and condition of women. After living in exile, being physically attacked, banned her books in Bangladesh, and being issued a fatwa against her, she had made many speeches, interviews, and writing opposing the injustice activities. Regarding her case, Iqbal A. Ansari

states, “The Taslima Nasreen case-which concerns the right to freedom of speech in conflict with the right of faith communities to dignity, along with issues related to women's rights-is not being treated by the media with the nuanced sensitivity that it deserves”(15). Then there are arguments regarding the issues of secular and liberal fundamentalist labels in Muslim social and ethno-religious issues. The main concern of her revolutionary ideas is against injustices and inequalities going on in societies mainly in Muslim culture and she demands for the freedom of women and reformation of Islamic religion.

Nasrin is powerful in using ethos. Ethos is often the first thing that is noticed, so it creates the first impression that influences how matter is perceived. Regarding it, Antoine C. Braet writes, “The "ethical proof' is formed by ethos (character or personality) of the speaker” (311). The speaker creates ethical proof by his credibility which are reflected in his/her practical wisdom, moral virtue and goodwill. She exposes her ideas mainly on secularism, feminism, freedom of expression, religious fanaticism and human rights to prove her credibility. For this, she says, “By my early teens, I had abandoned religion and turned toward secular humanism and feminism which sprang from within me and went in no way artificially imposed…As I grew older I broke away not just from religion but also from all religious customs, indeed the very culture which constantly oppressed, suppressed, and denigrated women (“India Foundation,” 00:02:14- 00:02:55).” Talking about women’s domination, bad aspects of imposed religion, culture, customs, and traditions, she becomes able to prove her ideas as persuasive. Similarly, she talks about the matter of helping women by making them conscious showing the weaknesses of religion. She tries to motivate to follow the ideas of secularism defying old religion as she opines, “I wanted to help women that they are oppressed because of religion. I wanted to encourage them to fight for their rights and freedom. My voice which challenged misogynistic tradition and religion gave women the chance to think differently (“Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc.,” 00:24:18 -00:24:34).” She even claims that many women have become antagonist, atheist and free thinker rejecting the male chauvinistic values imbedded in all religions.

Nasrin uses logos in her opinions. She presents the metaphor of making the heart of her audience her home as she does not feel any home. She has the feeling of helpless and hopeless to be homeless. She presents a saying that the heart of her supporters as her home, safe heaven, shelter and refuge. She uses the metaphor to prove persuade the audience as, “There is no place in this world that I can call my house but the people who support me, sympathize with me and express solidarity with me, they are my home., they are my country. My home is love,

the love I receive from women all over the world. That is my home. The love I receive from atheists, free thinkers, secularists and humanist is my home. The love I receive from you is my home ("Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc.," 00:33:43-00:34:16)." Her use of metaphorical expression appeals her reason of being homeless and secular. She presents the proof of being homeless and appeals reason and intellect for persuasion.

Nasrin uses pathos to facilitate acceptance of the speaker. Pathos refers to the audience's feelings and relies for persuasive effect on triggering audience emotions such as happiness, sadness, satisfaction, pity, or fear. Antoine C. Braet defines about it as, "The "pathetic proof" or pathos depends upon "putting the hearer into a certain frame of mind" through the speech" (314). The persuader conveys a sense that he/she understands and relates to the needs, values and desires of the audiences. From her speech Nasrin tries to present logic, data, claims, and evidence for persuasion. As she presents herself as a critic she has presented argument having the right to criticize the injustice activities going on in the society either on the basis of religion or superiority of male. Showing the proof of being homeless due her efforts of making women free from all kinds of injustices, she states as, "I have been living in exile since 1994. I know I have no other alternatives but to live in exile for the rest of my life. I feel I have nowhere to go, no country or home to return too. I say India is my country. India is my home ("India Foundation," 00:19:17- 00:19:40)." By many other ideas she has used the language of persuasion to appeal the emotion of her audiences and she is showing her attitude to the audience appealing them that she is honest who speaks true things. She is also going to impress the audiences saying how sorrowful life she is living. This type of appeal helps the speaker persuade the audiences.

Nasrin also opines that women should be educated and able to oppose male domination by writings. Helene Cixous et al. emphasize women to write for other women who are unable to write as, "I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs" (776). Similar to their ideas, Nasrin encourages women to discard male values to fight bravely for their rights as, "There was a burning desire within me to see women are educated and independent. Women stand up for and demand their equal rights and freedom. I wanted my writings to contribute in some ways to the empowerment of these women who had always been oppressed ("India Foundation," 00:06:39- 00:06:58)." Nasrin by her speech and writings urges women to be conscious and bold by making her claims stronger in case of women's rights and domination of all kinds.

Similarly she urges women to involve in writing although they are opposed. In this regard, she clarifies as, it is always the male writers and male painters describe women's bodies. They are the people who describe women's pleasures and they draw women's body nudes. No problems! Whenever women do it they are called 'whores' or you know porn writers ("The Quint," 00:06:40-00:07:05)." Women receive many abuses when they try to do new things. Persuasive appeals facilitate the broader acceptability and she has used them successfully to establish her points and assist to strengthen the issues of changing the world from the grip of extremists making women independent.

Conclusion

The main message of Nasrin's writings, speeches and interviews is to urge all people of the world to take initiation in process of the empowerment of women, reformation of religious practices, and the promotion of the freedom of expression. In this twenty first century, we talk about many types of rights including animal rights and empowerment of all kinds of people who are marginalized and segregated. She focuses on the protection of marginalized groups because they are always oppressed in any country by the people in power or in majority either in term of gender or race or culture, religion end economic status. Her works are full of harsh criticism for Islam in particular and other religions in general which never promote freedom of expression and women's rights. Her speeches and writings are concerned with dignity and compassion, democratization, equality, and the respect of all. She is quite aware of the techniques of persuading the audiences before her by her various works. The strong element of her works is the portrayal of pathetic condition of women in all communities due to imposing the provisions of religion which were made by men to preserve their dominating power. While analyzing her opinions expressed in all forms, she is found to be using the art of persuasion for her audiences by her credible ideas which are full of intellectual ideas, emotional expression of promoting freedom of expression, and dramatic appeal of making women educated. From the rhetorical analysis of Nasrin's speeches and interviews, it can be concluded that they motivate the audiences by examples, data, personal experiences, emotional appeals, credibility of the speaker, and logical reasoning with inferences of persuasion for the reformation of dogmatic religious, social and cultural practices and for female rights. She urges us to be ready to reform our religious ideas which are based on narrow concept and they cannot include all the people of the world. Similarly, domination of women is prevalent everywhere and collective effort is needed to change the status of women who are marginalized in multiple ways either by male

domination or by religion. The confidence she has developed for the sake of humanity makes her claims stronger even after being exiled and living in terror. Further research can be made to find the rhetoric of social problems in her works to reveal the other hidden aspects in her speeches, interviews, and writings.

Works Cited

Ansari, Iqbal A. "Free Speech-Hate Speech: The Taslima Nasreen Case." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2008, pp. 15-19.

Braet, Antoine C. "Ethos, Pathos and Logos in Aristotle's Rhetoric: A Re-Examination." *Argumentation*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1992, pp. 307-320.

Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron." *Quarterly journal of speech*, vol. 59, no. 1, 1973, pp. 74-86.

Cixous, Hélène et al. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875-893.

"CNN IBN Taslima Nasrin 22 4 200." *YouTube,* uploaded by itvindia, 17 May 2012, https://youtu.be/38VjtdgpWLM

Demirdöğen, Ülkü D. "The Roots of Research in (Political) Persuasion: Ethos, Pathos, Logos and the Yale Sudies of Persuasive Communications." *International Journal of Social Inquiry*, vol. 3, no.1, 2010, pp. 189-201.

Ghosh, Bishnupriya. "An Affair to Remember: Scripted Performances." *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*, Garland Publishing Inc., 2000, pp. 39-83

Kennedy, George A. *Aristotle, on Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse, Translated with Introduction, Notes and Appendices*. OUP, 2007.

Mshvenieradze, Tamar. "Logos Ethos and Pathos in Political Discourse." *Theory & Practice in Language Studies,* vol. 3, no.11, 2013, pp. 1939-1945.

"Taslima Nasrin Exclusive: Islam Is Not a Religion of Peace." *YouTube,* uploaded by India Today, 8 July 2016, https://youtu.be/fvC8kscL 6w

"Taslima Nasrin at India Ideas Conclave 2016." *YouTube,* uploaded by India Foundation, 12 November 2016, https://youtu.be/Ohl_L0hxCbA

"Taslima Nasrin: The Woman Who Destroyed a Mosque (Or Did She?)." *YouTube,* uploaded by The Quint, 19 March, 2018, https://youtu.be/XsDpOFkGlYo0

"Taslima Nasrin - My Struggle for Secularism." *YouTube,* uploaded by Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc., 11 April 2011, https://youtu.be/uenbyW87gUg

A Study of Feminist Ideals in Taslima Nasreen Works an Iconic Feminist

Gaurav Kumar[1], Dr. Bharti Karnik[2]
[1]Research Scholar, Jiwaji University, Gwalior, M.P
[2]Research Supervisor, Maharani Laxmi Bai Govt. College of Excellence, Gwalior, M.P

Abstract

Taslima Nasreen is a Bengali, Bangladeshi author, feminist human rights activist and secular humanist. Born in the middle class Muslim family in North of Bangladesh in 1962, she received liberal education. At the age of 23 she became a doctor and started working in the poorer parts of her country. She wrote extensively for periodicals when she came to the West‟s attention. She has won many awards including Ananda Puraskar, the Sakharov prize for freedom of thought from the European Parliament, the Kurt Tuckholsky award from Swedish PEN: a human rights prize from the French government, and a humanist Award from International Humanist and Ethical Union. Taslima Nasreen, after 18 years of exile, appeared in Delhi in public. Taslima is well aware that her battle is extremely significant, as fundamentalists would like to make everybody eat and wear and live with their straightjacket frame. It is opposed to fundamentalism because it refuses others the freedom to freely express their beliefs and cannot allow something that they consider to be unfaithful. "I do not accept that it is actually a disagreement between two sects – Christianity and Islam and Hinduism and Islam or Judaism and. In all religious traditions there are fundamentalists. The cancellation of her new Nirbasan book at the Kolkata Book Fair by Taslima Nasreen has shown that her controversy has become her second nature. Her dissertation focuses on women's rights as well as Islamic fundamentalist rights. Her right to freedom of speech has struggled. In an interview given in the Hindu "I want the government not to violate freedom of speech," she expresses her feelings of alienity to Bengal and Bangladesh". It is strange to know that it is not fundamentalists but the authorities that prevented Nirbasan from releasing him. In reality, Dwikhandito began to attack the fundamentalists. "Had they not banned the novel, the issues of attacks on me, setting my head price, deportation requirements and cancellation of my book launch would not have risen," says the author. She strongly believes" (The Hindu).

Keywords: *Feminist Ideals, Taslima Nasreen Works, Iconic Feminist, Feminist Human Rights.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Taslima has authored six novels, eight collections of poetry and four volumes of essays. The publishers and editors censored her books and columns. The publishers did not pay their royalties to ninety per cent. The three autobiography volumes of Amar Meyebela, Utal Hawa and Ka are her. The Dhaka court barred the first two volumes due to the defamation suit lodged by a renowned Bengali poet and romanticist, Syed Shamsal Haq. When she was targeted for her courageous criticism of the Qur'an and Islamic practises, he was the one who provided security in his home. Kolkata High Court was also barred from Dwikhandito (2002) the same book with additional chapters. The defamations of rupees of eleven crores have been submitted by Hasmat Jalal. It deals with Bangladesh's memory in the 1980s, when the military threw secularism out of Bangladesh. Since some Indians say it hurt their feelings, the book pulled contentious lines from the book. In 1994, because of the fatwa issued by Muslim religious leaders, she went to the West. They called for the execution of Taslima and it led to her arrest on blasphemy charges. This was because her book Lajja (Shame) was published in 1993. "I am sure you are tired of being referred to as the 'woman Salman Rushdie.'..but please remember that there is a lot of people in many countries who work to protect you from those that will happily see you dead. In the West there are so many eloquent apologists who work to persuade people that women in Muslim countries are not discriminated against (Excerpt from an open letter from Salman Rushdie to Taslima Nasrin)

In the B. B.C. interview, she said that she had attempted to view them as human beings and justify herself by questioning why she was not expected to write about these significant personalities. However, she added that that is

a storey from her life and something else. In her reply, she clarified her interactions with senior writers and journalists.

Taslima explored the horrible lives of many women of the country. She criticised the religion because it gave women a very marginal role in the society. Even if her husband tortures her, she has no right to say anything. This is also the part of the religious teaching. Women are widely discouraged to go to school. It is widely understood that they are born to cook and bear children. A man can marry up to four women, but a woman does not even have the right to choose her own husband. The family would decide her marital fate. Taslima‟s life is a live example of male chauvinism. She married three times and got divorced because those men wanted to control her. She wanted to do things on her own but none of them allowed her to do so. Syed Shamsul Haq, her editor husband did not show much interest in publishing her works. He started giving her advice on what to write and what not to write. After divorcing him, when she was living in the apartment, her father and brother visited her. She was surprised at their visit. They neither ate dinner nor went to sleep. They spent the whole night sitting in chairs. She did not know what the matter was with them. Next day morning when she was about to go to work, her father stopped her and said she need not go to the hospital. When she replied that the patients would be waiting for her, her father immediately pushed her down to the floor and kicked her in the stomach. While she managed to stand up, she got another push and a kick in the back. She fell on the refrigerator and cut her lips. Her brother threw a tabloid on her face. Taslima‟s physical abuse by her own father and brother is only due to her writings which criticised the Islamic fundamentalists and her three marriages which made them to hurt their prestige. She was forced to go to Maymonshigh and was locked in a room, where she was given food and a portable commode to respond to the nature calls. One morning when her mother brought her breakfast in, there was a sudden noise in the kitchen. Her mother ran to the kitchen forgetting to lock the room. Taslima got a chance to run out of the house. She took a detour to go to the Dhaka city. She did not know what to do and where to go. Her father gave up the apartment she rented, and her furniture was taken to Maymonshigh. She hardly found place to sleep. An editor gave her shelter and later married him. She did not actually wanted to marry him but she had no where to stay. Later on it was this editor who used to come home late in a drunken form and beat her up. Once he pushed her out of the door and locked it from inside. Taslima thought that it was enough. She decided once for all not to stay with him anymore. Besides her life, in this biographical novel, she discussed the women‟s problems in the society, the political unrest and the religious suppression. The socio economic situation and the uprising of the Muslim fundamentalism were also been illustrated. She wrote that religion is such a destroyer, even when it is not believed; the people are bounded by it. It is almost like a cancer that has no medicine. The government seized her passport and asked to get the government‟s approval if she had to publish anything. The authority told that every government employee had to go through the censorship. So she quit the hospital job and became a full time writer. Very soon Mullahs declared 50000taka for beheading her. They found fault with her for writing against Muhammad and Koran. There were rallies against her in every city demanding her death sentence. She was continuously being threatened over the phone. She wrote that she was staying at home holding her life in hand. The International Writers Groups, PEN and the Amnesty International kept on pressurising the government for her safety. Finally her passport was given back to her and she was thrown out to Europe in 1994. She stayed in the U.S where she pursued a fellowship at Harward on the possibility of secularism in the Islamic countries. She illustrated the darkness of the society.

Taslima remembers the custom of wearing burqa as meat protection in her essay "To keep meat safe." She heard from her mother that burki keep the meat safe and also follow Allah. She had several concerns about burqa and asked questions such as if her mother felt breathless if she was wrathful and threatened her.

"Don't tell the faithful women to keep their gaze on the ground, and to display their beauty and jewels, they must cover their breasts behind the purdach, not expose their beauty to anyone but their husbands, siblings, nephews, folk mothers, servants and eunuch employees and children.

In book 026 No. 5397, Bukhari Hadis, Taslima criticises the lines 33 and 59. She asks why did Allah not launch men's purdah? Allah is not comparable between men and women. Otherwise purdah will be there for both! The males are higher than the females. Therefore women have to go to prisons and men will pretend to be free birds. Ask why women are protected. Taslima issues It's all because it's sex objects. And they're excited when men see them. Why should women be blamed for sexual difficulties for men? There is sexual urgency also for women. However, for this, men are not protected. In no religion developed by men or women who are considered different from men, or as people who have separate desires and opinions. Not only modest women but also men are ruling purdah. She asks Shabana and her followers who believe that the Quran doesn't say anything about purdah. Taslima argues if

women should use purdah if the Qur'an recommends. She said she was going to say no personally. No matter which book it is written, who advises, who directs, women are not supposed to have purdah, no veil, no chador, no hijab. According to her, women should not use all of the above because they are all disrespectful resources. These are manifestations of the oppression of women to her. Women are told by them that they are merely men's property. For their use, artefacts. She claims this coverage is used to keep women passive and submissive. Women must wear it so that with their own self-respect, dignity, trust, separate identity, they cannot exist. Taslima eventually says that it means to cover a woman's head, cover her brain and make certain it does not work. If women's minds functioned properly, a religious and patriarchal system would have long ago thrown off these veils and burqas. It courageously communicates the message of protesting this injustice to Islamic women. They should declare a war against their hundreds of years of wrong and ill-treatment. The freedom and rights of men should be snatched. She's telling you to burn the burqas. The CPM, which claims to protect the principles of secularity, wants to keep it from the Kolkata, supported the right to freedom of speech, like BJP. Support for Taslima can lead to a loss in Western Bengal of Muslim votes. Both secular minds have every justification to endorse the appeal for citizenship of Taslima. Administration as a human being and a competent writer should uphold its rights. The Tasleema residence in India is assisted by Khushwant Singh, Arundati Roy, Leela Seth, Kuldeep Nayyar, Vijay Tendulkar, Arun Roy, Shyam Benagal, Girish Karnad, Saeed Naqui, Y.P. Chibb. You upheld your right to make it clear that it is your fundamental right to speak immediately about any subject, including the burqa.

2. AN ICONIC FEMINIST

Just two days after the Center announced that it would continue to shelter the exiled author but she had to abstain from harming religious feelings, Taslima Nasreen has deleted controversial lines from her autobiographical book Dwikhandito. She said she'd take out of her book Dwikhandito the contentious lines. In 2002, this book was written on the basis of her Bangladeshi memories in the 1980s, which excluded secularism from the Bangladesh Constitution. She said she admired laicism and she wanted to keep secularism in Bangladesh. It was not because the Muslim unhappy with this book that the West Bengal administration banned the third volume of her autobiography, Dwikhandito, that No Muslim requested the prohibition. The point of the government was that anything could happen. South Asian scientists condemned the attacks on Bangladesh and Indian governments to defend Taslima's reputation and freedom of speech, in order not to become a pawn between the Hindu and the Muslim chauvinist powers in an ugly stalemate. So many people have sponsored her from Cambridge University. More than 100 people have also sponsored candlelight to share their disappointment about Taslima Nasreen's hasty transportation from western Bengal. The demonstrators at the vigil thought free speech should be regardless of race, sex or religion. The foundation for a democratic society is to express oneself or oneself. The BJP has emerged in its defence as Taslima based its writings on Islam and Prophet Mohammad. They tried to improve their anti-Muslim status and thus consolidate the Hindu voting bank. In an interview with Out Look, she said that she was not a religious expert but in the name of faith she could not accept inhumanity. She wrote about the rights of women and, also, the fundamentalist's women's rights, as well as the rights of women and fundamentalism cannot coincide in her interview with Sheela Reddy in Rajasthan Tasleema. It is unfortunate that, every year until 2004, she began her tourism in West Bengal. In Kolkata, she loves to be. Even though she was better off overseas, she feels that she is outsider. She loves to linger in India—a Bengali, a Rajasthani, a Malayan, and everything. She says her writing is become political, because even without reading the stuff in the shops of Kolkata was burned up.

When asked whether she was opposed to Islam she answered that women were suffering from religious and cultural laws and customs. It is not her intention to injure the feelings of anyone. Religiosity and otherwise, as she firmly believed in democracy and freedom of speech, yet to protect human rights and secular humanity. Her books also deal with the rights of women and women. She spoke about religious rules and customs in just a few pages. She had to write about religion when human rights are abused in the name of religion. She says religion is not her subject, and she is not an expert in religion. Her indignation at being labelled anti-Islam is a matter of disgust. She couldn't picture the events of liberal democracy India in Bangladesh. It would be normal, but not in India, if it happened in Saudi Arabia or Iran. She founded and educated them against fundamentalism a secular Muslim organisation in Kolkata.

She talked about feminism in South Asia, which is not strong, at The Hindu interview on February 12, 2012. After all, women didn't even struggle in India for their rights. She thinks it is important to take problems more seriously in relation to women's atrocities:

"Such as their counterparts in the West, they did not have to combat voting rights. It was men who were fighting for women, educating them to prohibit Sati, to avoid child wedlock, to rematch widows, etc. It says India is the most dangerous place for women, and that women are rapidly fetished or murdered, the exploitation of women, sexual slavery and domestic abuse. Indeed, it's war on women (The Hindu one).

The documentary novel Lajja (Shame) is a documentary on the precarious presence in Bangladesh of the Hindu minority following the destruction by Hindu fundamentalist citizens on 6 December 1992 of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, India. The Bangladeshi Muslim crowds took vengeance on the Hindu minority. In 1993 it was prohibited for disrupting social peace. A criminal case was filed in 1994 by the Bangladeshi government. For a time, fundamentalists assaulted her violently, knocked to the ground and ripped clothing, at the National Library Fair in Bangladesh. However, in defence of her many secular philosophers, literally they saved her life. In the countries that wrote many article supporting her in their papers, she also had the support of many Muslims. There came to her defence Iranian feminists. Taslima likes speaking openly and frankly without something being concealed. Tactics are not her religion. She's not a politician or a diplomat. Whatever she thinks she tells. The statistical accuracy of Muslims' communal atrocities against Hindus of Bangladesh has been reported. The entire novel concerns a family that had been confronted by violence in Bangladesh in 1992 by some Hindus. During this time, the author wrote of the accidents. Enlistment of Hindu women and more and more. Over 200 temples have been confirmed to be demolished and over 1000 Hindus have been targeted and made homeless. This roman demonstrates the protest of the case by Taslima. She tells the storey of a fictional family during the violence. She says she doesn't think that Hindus are good and in any way that Muslims are evil. She claims the book has studied the psychological and relationship consequences of abuse and oppression. The injustice seems to pollute both sides. In her book she has provided numerous accurate accounts of the Hindu minority's discretion and destruction. The answer was serious. This book. After the book was released, Islamic fundamentalists gave her a large cash prize. Her integrity, intense intellect and bravery are moving readers. The book will show you to look again at yourself and the world in which you work. It tells the reader how he thinks that all abusses and injustices are coming to an end in the world. The book is the worldwide storey of minority persecution. For all young people, she thinks it should be compulsory reading. It addresses genocide and describes a minority genocide which fully removes its presence. Taslima Nasreen shares her thoughts about her novels and her life as a filmmaker. She says no filmmaker is permitted to film in West Bengal based on her novel or on the life of her cat. "I'm never going to be silenced. until my death I shall continue my fight for fairness and equality" (The Hindu, Aug 31, 2012).

3. APPROPRIATION OF HER WORK

Whereas Nasrin has continued to condemn Islam, some have mistakenly taken her job of portraying Islam and Muslims in a neo-orientalistic way. For eg, the highly critical Bangladeshi Muslims Lajja (Nasrin, 1994[1993]) had initially six Chapters but its Indian edition was increased to 13 (Deen, 2006: 94), and the BJP distributed it free in India after "sections not in the original novel" (Siddiqi, 2009: 32). The American version of Lajja is subtile 'The Provocative Book Unleashing a Tempest in the Muslim World' (Zafar 2005: 416), an interpolation which contains, on the basis of a context-specific, localised, and controversial book, a deliberate vilification of the Muslim world. Islam, apart from the life of her marginalised mother, is visibly absent in Nasrin's Amar Meyebela. However, it has been ideal to incite and enforce biases against Islam and Muslims in the American edition of its English version. While Amar Meyebela (SpainEnglish)'s translation is 'My Girlhood,' the American edition puilt on the post-11 semester is titled Meyebela: My Bengali Girlhood — A Memoir to Grow Female in Muslim World. While the book's English translations are 'My Girlhood.' In a synopsis of neo-orientalist paternalism, Amazon electronic book seller uses outdated colonial tropes and states;

What Amazon seems to insinuate, is that while the world is moving about and rid of injustice and cultural myths, the imaginary Muslim world remains backwards and anachronistic throughout primitive times, and in places such as Bangladesh. This emphasises that while social practises differ throughout the Islamic world, Westerners often define Islam, and especially the role of women in Islam, as static and set. In this regard, Tax (2002: 1), when she states with reference to America that "[in a society which know little about any kind of islam, Nasrin's dark image can be universalized and received too eagerly," expresses relevant concern about the distorted English rendering. The false name of the American edition of Amar Meyebela can be seen as a hype for sales, but it frustrates another admirable point and the supposed symbolic revolt by the Nasrin against the linguistic Bangla orders, which usually covered girlhood (meyebela), and subsumed by the word boyhood (chelebela). Perhaps Nasrin wanted to transmit a significant message by parodying Tagore's (1940) Chelebela, that although the term girlhood is overshadowed in

English by boyhood, life for the girl is equally important in recording and also worthy of narrativisation. Sadly, the distorted title and description of the book frustrates this message and neglect the fact that in Bangladesh in the meantime much of it has changed. Surprisingly, it is not known that the open-minded and clear Nasrin opposed these distortions. She can further confirm this silence and her involvement in vilifying Islam, Islamic symbols and Bangladesh.

4. CRITIQUING NASRIN'S FEMINIST STRATEGY OF DEPRECATING ISLAM

Nasrin's omnipresent vituperations against Islam supposedly represent women's rights, while they are targeting millions of Muslims who love their mothers, wives, daughters and other women, because Islam has given them orders to do that. The whole topic of freedom of expression may be troublesome by promoting such inflammatory comments for free speech (Hasan, 2010). These comments harm the psyche of Muslims and unnecessarily cause social disputes and unrest. For example, during the 1994 Bangladesh anti-Nasrin camp, they prompted the killing of two young boys and at the beginning of March, they also killed 2 more people in Karnataka in India (Hasan, 2010: 549). In addition, opponents of Nasrin claim that a front-line war against Islam is detrimental to the noble cause of Bangladesh's women's rights movement. It's just confrontational rather than engaging constructively with the "other." Since Nasrin is known as a feminist, ordinary people are ready to associate it – and, in reality, the usual hatred of the Islam – with feminism which ultimately makes it hard to achieve the rights of women in a Muslim society. "Nasrin went for the jugular, and we are not ready for that," a social worker, who promotes women's rights in Bangladesh's remote countryside (coted in Hashmi, 2000: 203), says. Too much is involved, simply. You must learn how to manage the situation... and Nasrin never realised it. Tax (2002: 4) claims, rightly, that Nasrin 'was misgenerating about Islam in the variant she had in Bangladesh, and that by targeting it explicitly you cannot change culture anyway.' But, as cited in Tax (2002: 5) she reiterates, Nasrin is not persuaded,

"I always get advised that tactics are a matter...but I don't think tactics... It takes too long to use tactics; to make secularism this way takes too long. What I want is a revolution - for women's rights, for humanism and to expel things like religion that are not important."

Begum Rokeya, who is highly respected by most Bangladeshis, also participated in discussions on the role of women in Islam. She has questioned and re-examined, as a committed advocate of reform (Hossain 1992, I). She has uncritically taken the persistence of the patriarchal notions of Islam as a norm and clearly denigrates faith in the light of gender justice. While Nasrin refers in her writing to Rokeya in several places, possibly to gain credibility in Bangladesh, she is not pursuing her strategy as a feminist. At the time when women were literally and metaphorically segregated in the home, Rokeya fought for the women's right in Bengal, officially denied education and absolutely invisible in public life as their freedom was limited by the principle of intense seclusion (purdah). Rokeya trod carefully and clearly Islam, gaining her a much needed support network, from cultural traditions. Thus, while Rokeya had critics, both liberal and religious groups in society overthrew her opposition and helped her make substantial strides in the development of women's rights. Their number was also highly influential. Today Rokeya has a good credit for her relentless battle to raise consciousness among women's rights, while her scholarly work, education movement and political activism have genuinely sprung from Muslim Bengal's women's movement. On the other hand, despite its regional and international recognition, Nasrin's work has done little in the feminist struggle of Bangladeshi women, despite its prolificity as a writer. The relationships between Nasrin and most other Bangladeshi women are impermeable and polarised. This perhaps is because Nasrin was incapable of recognising the systemic and profound causes of Bangladeshi women's oppression and her dubious diagnosis of gender relations in Bangladesh. In comparison, Rokeya correctly defined and strategically successful tackled the apparent and latent causes of women's suffering in society and not in religion itself. Whilstead of using pseudo-Islim claims to monitor and marginalise the women's movement, Rokeya has not launched a head-on attack on Islam. The women are detractors of educational, economic and legal rights. Instead, she stressed and emphasised gender equality in her faith and used it as a foundation for her women's rights movement.

Conversely, while gender oppressors are irreligious in Nasrin's autobiography, she seeks to ridicule and denigrate Islam for gender inequality, thus losing public help. The approach of Rokeya evidently consisted of poles except Nasrin. While most of the adversaries in their society were religious, Rokeya did not want to target Islam because she misunderstood her teachings. The patriarchal institution, for example, opposed the women's education campaign in Rokeya. There were flimsy excuses, such as the plea that women were disobedient once educated. Rokeya used Islamic religious texts in those cases to address the resistance of her society to women's education. Rokeya claimed

that "it is the duty of all Muslim men and women to acquire knowledge, in no small measure, by referring to our great prophet." However, our brothers would not make us properly interested in education' (Hossain, 2006 [1927]: 491). Such a style of argumentation legitimised the feminist movement of Rokeya in a Muslim culture and made it intellectually and religiously defenceless to the Muslim patriarchal development. Though she argued 'for a change in men's views of women and women, she was anxious not to lose her Muslim identity' (Hossain, 1992: 1). On the other hand, Nasrin typically punishes Muslims for believing in Islam because of her rejection of religion per se. Nasrin also opted for blasphemous remarks about the Prophet. The protracted invective that has spread during her work against the Prophet does not contribute to the empowerment of women. Instead it generated reactions among the Muslim community's rank and file and led to violent protests. In contrast with Nasrin, Rokeya paid the Prophet the highest tribute to the prophet.

Regarding the strategy of feminism, Kandiyoti (1996: 9) argues that in Muslim culture, feminist debate can "legitimately proceed in just two directions: either deny that Islamic practises are necessarily suppressive or argue that oppression is not necessarily Islamic." The second approach is taken by most Islamic feminists. While Islamic Feminism has been used only since the nineties (Samiuddin & Khanam, 2002: v), particularly in the sense of the struggle of Muslim Muslim women for education & social justice in South Asia, 'Intellectual encounters with feminism date back to the early twentieth century.' Islamic feminism questions socio-cultural gender stereotypes and illustrates Islamic gender formulations. Islamic feminists 'criticise false interpretations and use the spectrum of interpretations offered by the text... to create a dialogue... to free them from God and to escape masochistic imagination of either the east or the west' (Ramadan, 2004: 141–2). Islam 'places two sexes on a level playing field before God, even though women have been subordinated in social terms to men' (Ray, 2002: 43). Through treatment of women in the Qur'an they have a solid theoretical base because they think that the real emancipation of women lies in the right interpretation of Islam, not in their absence. Islamic feminism is indigenous and has its own system for tackling patronage; Western ideas regarding women's rights are not completely respected.

5. CONCLUSION

Reposing western perceptions of women's rights in general helps to lift so-called Islamism and subsequent street protests without appreciating local truths. In the various manifestations in 1997, 2008 and 2011, for example, the National Women's Development Policy (Jatiya Nari Unnayan Niti), especially in the Islamic communities, was a great uproar, as this policy was supposed to grant women equal inheritance rights, explicitly contradicting the Qur'anic verse (4: 11). Although the scope of this Article fails to offer thorough discussion on the heritage of women, the Nasrin affair has revealed here that aggressive focus on contested matters, such as legacy, polygamy, same-sex marriage and the promotion of anti-Islamic legislation may do more harm than good to the wider objective of improving the situation of women and men Moreover, in view of the status of the great majority of women in Bengal there are more important and urgent issues on the agenda than these controversial ones, including 'education, harassment of wives, humane treatment of women and so on (Bullock, 2002: xXVIii). On a final note, Nasrins has been unable to recognise and to contribute meaningfully to the continuing struggles to eradicate the legal and social disabilities of women in Bangladesh, considering its international visibility and global recognition. In Bangladesh's culture, she generated a strong sense of distrust of feminism and different noble attempts to build and improve women's rights among ordinary people. The enthusiastic international acknowledgement of Nasrin complicates the link between modernity's metanarratives and conventional western feminism and the fundamental reality of Bangladesh's status as a woman. Moreover, a block on collective feminist consciousness around the world may be the appropriation of Nasrin's context-specific work to discredit Islam and the Muslim world in the post-9/21 period. This does not mean that today, in Bangladesh, academic debate about the role of women in Islam or political debates about the status of women should be discouraged. However, Nasrin did not choose the right way to do so, as this article showed. Indeed, their anti-religious stance stirs the fire of those who want to say that today's pluralist visions of Bangladesh based on respect for nationalism, democracy and socialism, and respect for all religions under the label of secularism, which is much misunderstood, are an hour. There is no inherently reciprocal exclusion between worthy political causes, including women's and other oppressed groups' rights and devotion to Islam. This study thus reinforces Bangladesh's increasing realisation that militant anti-religious secularism of the sort that Taslima Nasrin is pursuing does not provide an adequate structure to resolve gender issues in the unique Bangladeshi socio-cultural context.

6. REFERENCES

1. Ray, Bharati (2002) Early Feminists of Colonial India: Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
2. Razavi, Shahra & Jenichen, Anne (2010) 'The Unhappy Marriage of Religion and Politics: Problems and Pitfalls for Gender Equality', Third World Quarterly, 31(6): 833–50.
3. Salway, Sarah, Jesmin, Sonia & Rahman, Shabana (2005) 'Women's Employment in Urban Bangladesh: A Challenge to Gender Identity?', Development and Change, 36(2): 317–49.
4. Samiuddin, Abida & Khanam, R. (2002) 'Preface'. In A. Samiuddin & R. Khanam (Eds), Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement: South Asia (Vol. 3, pp. v–x). Delhi: Global Vision.
5. Schleifer, Aliah (1986) Motherhood in Islam. Cambridge: The Islamic Academy.
6. Siddiqi, Dina M. (2009) 'Taslima Nasrin and Others: The Contest Over Gender in Bangladesh'. In Ali Riaz (Ed.), (Re)Reading Taslima Nasrin (pp. 15–41). Dhaka: Shrabon.
7. Sobhan, Salma (1994) 'National Identity, Fundamentalism and the Women's Movement in Bangladesh'. In Valentine M. Moghadam (Ed.), Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies (pp. 63–80). London: Zed Books.
8. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1999) A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
9. Tagore, Rabindranath (1940) Chelebela [My Boyhood Days]. Calcutta: Biśvabhāratī Granthālay.a.
10. Tax, Meredith (2002) 'Taslima's Pilgrimage', The Nation (31 October). URL (consulted 3 May 2011), from http://www.thenation.com/article/taslimas-pilgrimage
11. Tharu, Susie & Lalita, K. (Eds) (1991) Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present (Vol. 1). London: Pandora.
12. Tickell, Alex (2005) 'Introduction'. In A. Tickell (Ed) Shoshee Chunder Dutt: Selections from 'Bengaliana' (pp. 7–22). Nottingham: Trent Editions.

A Site of Subaltern Articulation: The Ecstatic Female Body in the Contemporary Bangladeshi Novels of Taslima Nasrin

Published: Dec. 1, 1999 • By **Saiyeda Khatun**

Introduction

[1] The emergence of Taslima Nasrin's feminist writings inaugurates one of the most controversial moments in the scene of Bangladeshi literature. The news of her exile from Bangladesh in August, 1994, drew considerable international attention. The fundamentalists in Bangladesh issued a death threat against her for allegedly blaspheming the Quran. As a result, readers in the West were misled into viewing Taslima as a female counterpart of Salman Rushdie. What remained obscured by such an analogy was Taslima's equally relentless attack against the secular male elite of Bangladesh. Moreover, although there was a great deal of newspaper coverage of her exile, any in-depth study of her fictional works has yet to emerge. Such studies are crucial in foregrounding the unique style of her challenge and intervention against male domination within a specifically Bangladeshi context.

[2] Taslima, in all of her work, obsessively comes back to the question of the female body, and her writings pivot on an exploration of the female body as it is constructed by the Bangladeshi patriarchy. Her focus on the female body can be traced back through to her non-fictional works such as the newspaper columns, her poetry and her novels which represent a culmination of her exploration of female desire.

[3] Taslima initiates a break with the tradition of Bangladeshi literature. The literature of Bangladesh is replete with instances where self-sacrificing motherhood is celebrated. For example, in one of the classical texts, Shaukat Osman's Janani (1961), Daria, the central character, kills herself to expiate her sin when she gives birth to an illegitimate child as a result of her rape. Daria confronts the patriarchal imperative of self-sacrifice in the face of "moral duty." The sign of motherhood in Osman is invested with symbolic meanings, and is idealized through the self-immolation of Daria's body.[1] But in Taslima no such self-immolation can be endorsed. In Taslima we do not see a celebration of the metaphoric motherhood of Janani; instead we see a delinking of motherhood from the ideal of self-sacrifice. Taslima invests the sign with a politics of subversion and protest. Unsanctioned pregnancies are endorsed in Taslima's stories with an agenda of empowering women, and an illegitimate child, the cause of Daria's tragic suicide is transformed, as a deliberate measure, to gain material ends in Taslima's stories. Reading Taslima in light of Osman's hegemonic text brings to focus the strategies of her oppositional discourse. Such a comparison also underscores how Taslima initiates an epistemic violence and foregrounds emancipatory possibilities for Bangladeshi women.[2]

[4] Epistemology usually is defined as the theory of the origin, nature, methods and limits of knowledge. The question of epistemic violence is related to issues such as who produces knowledge, or how power and desire appropriate and condition the production of knowledge. I reformulate the term epistemic violence to introduce the oppositional discourse of Taslima, which has startled, baffled, and angered advocates of patriarchal power in Bangladesh. In Gayatri Spivak's formulation, epistemic violence results when in (post)colonial discourse, the subaltern is silenced by both the colonial and indigenous patriarchal power.[3] I reformulate this concept of epistemic violence to characterize the resistant writings of Taslima. When the subaltern(ized) speaks, s/he, I am arguing,

causes violence to the episteme of the dominant power both by the very fact of her/his articulation, and by posing a new knowledge contestory to the dominant one.

[5] In the context of women's subalternization, how do Taslima's representations foreground a new episteme? In Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge dynamics, an episteme consists of the "unitary body of theory" which tends to privilege some knowledges while it subjugates certain others ranking them low in its hierarchical paradigm. These disqualified knowledges pose challenges to the power and organization of the dominant episteme by claiming attention to their oppositional emergence. Taslima's writings bring to the forefront such subjugated knowledges. As Hayden White in his interpretation of Foucault's tropology has explained, the dominant trope (metaphor, simile, symbol characteristic of the discourse of a period) of a given community of discourse determines both "what can be seen" in the world, as well as "what can be known about it."[4] Taslima's writings intrude upon this tropological field with challenge. One crucial example is her assertion of female sexuality which is a taboo for the women of Bangladesh.

[6] To understand how Taslima empowers subaltern women in her new episteme, it is important to define female subalternity in the Bangladeshi context. There is a wide range of subalternity among Bangladeshi women. A poor woman is subject to extreme subalternization since her lack of education severely limits her access to power; male violence is also relatively more common among the poor. A middle class woman, on the other hand, might enjoy above-subsistence life style and in some cases might be highly educated (but not necessarily) and decently employed. However, in a patriarchal society, she is vulnerable to subalternity in terms of property, marriage, and divorce laws of which an expanded account will be given later. A Bangladeshi woman cannot prove any entitlement to her income since, as we shall see, there are no legal guidelines protecting her. If divorced or widowed without a son to support her financially, she may become a poor woman herself, especially if she is not educated. Socially the upper class woman may be above the norm to a certain degree. For example, the constraints of family honor may be a little lax for the rich, but legally she is subject to the same patriarchal laws. As a physician and a writer, Taslima belongs to the elite class, yet she inhabits subaltern space by virtue of her gender.

[7] The system of dowry encompassing all classes very effectively sums up the different degrees of subalternity devaluing all women. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 outlaws dowry. But the custom has survived with extraordinary might and resilience. Although nobody calls it dowry, a bride's status in the in-law family is directly related to what she brings from the natal family in terms of money and goods. The value of dowry may vary across classes ranging from a watch and a bicycle to a television and refrigerator, to a car. Despite the Dowry Prohibition Act, dowry has been the cause of gender violence. Rabia Bhuiyan inAspects of Violence Against Women has pointed out that although official figures are under-reported, between 1986 and 1988, eighty-six cases of dowry violence with murder were committed against women in Bangladesh.[5]

[8] In the pages that follow I explore how the marriage and divorce laws of Bangladesh subalternize women, erase their subjectivity and establish male supremacy. My study of Taslima's novels, Aparpokkhoand Shodh, addresses how her assertion of female desire outside of the marital bond validates female sexuality in a society which is based on the systematic regulation of female sexuality through religion and other socio-cultural mechanisms. I show that Taslima foregrounds hitherto repressed knowledges about

female desire. In my analysis, I investigate the utilization of the womb by the protagonists of Taslima's stories to argue that they subvert and threaten patrilineality, the very foundation of a muslim society, by conceiving babies outside of marriage and by openly claiming the desirability of such measures. The patriarchal inheritance law is at stake since a son is heir to his father's property. I argue that the system of patrilineal descent is rendered fragile by the unsanctioned pregnancies of these married women.

[9] In order to examine how Taslima's narrative technique institutes a rupture in the Bangladeshi epistemic tradition, it is important to look at her use of the first person narrator. I argue that the public assertion of her heroines on sexual self-determination of women and illegitimate pregnancies is narrated in the first person to shock the reader into rethinking the issue of women's self-determination and rights to her body. Finally, I suggest that whereas in Spivak, the subaltern women experience physical horror and even annihilation of their bodies, Taslima's women represent a different oppositional model by enunciating and confirming the ecstatic pleasure of the body and by utilizing the womb to disrupt the male order. Although the shadowy space of the gendered subaltern that Spivak focuses on is not synonymous with the subalternized space that Taslima's heroines inhabit, I agree with S.M. Alam that "Nasrin's writings represent the issue of gendered [subaltern] self-representation in an era when it has been denied by both Islamic fundamentalists and the modernizing nation-state".[6]

[10] The figure of the silent subaltern dominates the postcolonial terrain of Spivak's theory. In the postcolonial field, Spivak's model of the silent subaltern has constituted the overarching discourse. Her theorization of the postcolonial female body is primarily based on Mahasweta Devi's stories. Spivak analyzes Mahasweta's story "Breast Giver" in which Jashoda the female subaltern (poor and disempowered) dies from cancer, unattended and uncared for, after breast feeding at least thirty boys as a hired mother in the bourgeois Haldar family. Jashoda sells her excess milk to the Haldar family to earn her livelihood. At the end her milk is depleted and her body is invaded by cancer. At this critical juncture she is abandoned by the Haldar family and she dies a gruesome death. In her analysis, Spivak demonstrates that Jashoda's body, rotting with one thousand mouths of cancer, inhabits a space which is violent and is marked by ultimate silence perpetrated by patriarchal mechanisms. In the end, Jashoda, a victim of super-exploitation, cannot articulate her own story or resist her annihilation.

[11] Spivak's strategy as a postcolonial critic is to represent the effects of these subject-deprived subaltern positions and utilize these effects to point to the injustice of their disarticulation, and thereby to "reinscribe" positive "subject positions" for the subaltern.[7] It is important to look at how the figuration of the female body in Taslima's work represents a different possibility.

Historical Overview of Bangladeshi Patriarchy: An Account of Marriage and Divorce Laws

[12] Bangladesh was part of Pakistan until 1971. Economic exploitation of Bangladesh by the Pakistani government led to the freedom movement and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. According to its present constitution, Bangladesh is a secular country. Yet marriage, divorce and property rights constitute a realm which falls under the category of Muslim personal law orshari'a law. Shari'a law derives itself from the

Quran and the injunctions of the Hadith (the prophet's way of life). According toshari'a law, a husband can divorce his wife by a triple pronouncement of the word talak (divorce). The woman has to observe a period of Iddat (three menstrual cycles) during which she cannot remarry, thereby also ensuring the paternity of a child if she is pregnant. The Family Ordinance of 1961, during the Pakistani period, introduces new guidelines into the shari'a law. For example, to initiate divorce, the husband has to notify the Chairman of the local municipal committee and send a copy of the notification for divorce to the wife. Within a month of that notice, a reconciliation committee is formed by the Chairman, and negotiation efforts start toward reconciling the two contending parties. If all attempts fail, divorce will take effect after a period of ninety days.[8] But most women in the villages are not aware of such an ordinance, neither would women want to appear before committees for a hearing. In the villages divorce may still be performed by a triple pronouncement of the word, talak.

[13] In post-independent Bangladesh one important change that has taken place is the 1985 Family Court Ordinance establishing the family court, for the first time, to resolve exclusively the issues of marriage, divorce and inheritance. Even now, however, the wife obtains the "privilege" of divorcing her husband only if the husband delegates it to her. As Mojibor Rahman has noted, a husband can divorce his wife on practically any ground, but a wife cannot divorce her husband at her will.[9] However, a woman who gains the right of divorce or talak-e-tawfiz as set forth in the marriage document (at the permission of her husband) can dissolve the marriage following the same rules of notification through the Chairman as her husband. When the woman is given no such rights of divorce, she can only initiate it through the family court (through a legal suit rather than a notification) and on appropriate grounds ranging from desertion by her husband to sexual impotence (The 1939 Divorce Act).[10]

[14] The family ideology of Bangladesh insistently glorifies women's suffering thereby exhorting a "good" woman to be heroic or stoic in the face of overwhelming obstacles in the marital relationship. For example, in Bangladeshi folk lore, a chaste woman is defined as one who surrenders all her needs at her husband's feet: "A chaste woman gives up her life for his [master/husband's] devotion/Her one goal is but her devotion/ In sleep, in dreams and when she is awake."[11] This is a mystical relationship of worship and surrender as if the husband is a god, and a wife his disciple. Religious values are very strong in the popular imagination as well. According to one Hadith, women's dedication to domestic life is equivalent to the glory of a Jihad or a holy war.[12]

[15] In Bangladesh, a family's honor or ijjat is dependent on the conduct of its women and their success in marriage. Virginity and chastity are the defining qualities of a good woman, and she can preserve her honor only under the guardianship of a man; the father is in charge of protecting her virginity, the husband her chastity. A divorced woman, no longer having the guardianship of her husband, severely damages her family's ijjat. She is not only an economic burden on her family, but also a sexual threat to society at large. Considering the overwhelming obstacles that beset a divorced woman, it is unlikely that anyone will exercise the power of divorce even if she has that entitlement. Moreover, going to court for a divorce is extremely dishonorable for Bangladeshi women. Although an upper class woman is somewhat free from the norm, divorce stigmatizes her all the same only to a different degree.

[16] Taslima boldly violates the dictates of ijjat, and exposes the disempowering agenda of the ideology of women's dependence on man. She observes:

Women can't go anywhere without a male companion [protector]. . . . If you want to board the bus, the conductor will ask, where is the man?. . . . In so many spheres of life, women are harassed if they are not accompanied by men. If there is a male companion who is neither a husband nor a near-relative, trouble is inevitable. Who is this man? And if you are alone, the issue is why are you without a man?[13]

A divorced woman is the prime target of such social harassment and she is likely to stumble against her single status at every step of her life irrespective of class. Divorce is more frequent among the poorer class who are ironically below the norm and hence somewhat free from the constraints of family honor. Yet divorce and desertion drive them to destitution often with children to support.

[17] A married woman with children is normally entitled to one-eighth of her husband's property. But in the event of a divorce, she loses any rights to her husband's property. She is entitled to support from her husband only for the period of Iddat. She can receive mahr, an amount of money specified in the marriage document which is payable to the wife upon demand or at the dissolution of her marriage. It is usually a very low amount, and inflation reduces its value even further. A divorced woman can fall back on her parents if they are alive because a daughter inherits half the son's property, but as Kabeer has pointed out, " most women waive their rights to the land in favour of their brothers. Dependent on male protection, they bargain away their right to land in exchange for the promise of kin support in times of distress."[14]

[18] It is important to note, however, that the enforcement of Islamic gender ideology has been weakened in Bangladesh by the political instability and economic crisis of the period after 1971.[15] In the eighties, new economic pressures and the erosion of traditional refuge brought rural women to the garment factories in Dhaka for employment. As village women were gaining access to the industrial economy, women in the city were getting educated at an increasing rate. Consequently, they became more conscious of their dependent status (where the husband is the guardian), and of the deprivation of their rights.

[19] At such a time, the formation and development of some feminist organizations such as Mahila Parishad, Nari Shangotimarked a breakthrough in the struggle of women against patriarchal oppression. In the rural sector, NGOs (non-governmental organizations) organized the village women towards improving their condition. Organizations such as Proshika andSaptagram succeeded in raising the consciousness of the poor women. As a result, there has been a definite increase in the number of wage-earning women, and in the number of women who have ventured outside the confines of their homes.

[20] However, the ideology and the policy of the government has remained paternalistic. Although the Feminist movement in Bangladesh has fallen short of achieving its goal, certainly there has been a growing awareness of male domination which should be recognized. It is against the backdrop of such growing awareness of gender subordination as systemic, that Taslima emerges on the scene of Bangladeshi literature. A physician by profession, popular as a columnist and a poet but also known as a novelist, Taslima appears at this time with a voice full of energy and rage.

[21] Critics and reviewers sympathetic to Taslima have observed that the pain and anger of Taslima's writings are unique in the history of the literature of Bangladesh. These critics have equally emphasized that while Taslima's articulation is unique, her pain is representative of countless other women's lives in Bangladesh. Meer Nurul Islam, in his review, focuses on Taslima's rage as a crucial necessity to transform society. He argues:

> Within the bounds of our closed society, darkness reigns so strongly, that there is no fissure to let in light or air. If one cannot make a chink through a needle or a nail on that wall of darkness, one can only use a spade, or an axe, or a hammer and a chisel to bore holes for light.[16]

The metaphors of enlightenment used by Islam are problematic. By defining darkness as negative and light as positive, he participates, either willingly or inadvertently, in inferiorizing the people of color. One of the major concerns of both postcolonial and postmodern discourse has been to foreground the failure of the project of enlightenment. Critics of enlightenment argue that in Western history, reason (which brings enlightenment) has functioned as a tool in the hands of the powerful against the disempowered. For example, colonizers have often justified their colonizing agenda by arguing that it will civilize the natives.

[22] Within the above context, the rhetoric of Islam's review is problematic. However, it is important to take into account his positive contribution. He does point out that the crucial gender problem in Bangladesh is that women are constantly objectified and sexualized. According to him, Taslima is sailing against the tide with extraordinary boldness–the boldness that most people lack.[17]

[23] In the controversy surrounding Taslima, critics who are unsympathetic to her have argued that Taslima is anti-Islamic, anti-male, and that she is too vulgar and commercial a writer in her representation of sex. Some have labelled her as "unscrupulous and market-oriented."[18]

[24] While critics opposed to Taslima bring charges of obscenity, immodesty and anti-religious sentiments against her, her supporters praise the openness and honesty of the unvarnished mode of her representations. Her opponents cry foul and moral chaos when Taslima wants to shake the entire structure of patriarchy; her supporters praise her courage and honesty and welcome the tremor which causes cracks in the patriarchal defence. Underneath it all, what comes across is that one group considers gender inequality a given, the other sees it as a construction and calls for its deconstruction.

[25] How Taslima's writings have drawn so much popular attention is one of the intriguing questions that poses itself for scrutiny. In his analysis of the Taslima controversy, Ali Riaz has aptly pointed out that "She [Taslima] earned a 'notoriety' for stirring debate and creating controversy often for raising issues which are considered 'explosive' by Bangladeshi society, and at times for her provocative style of writing."[19] The issues Taslima raises and the way she presents them call for our attention.

[26] Taslima, at least initially, and on a superficial level, seems to be assimilable by Bangadeshi tradition. It is important to note that the system of veil and dowry and other socio-cultural practices subjugating women have been targets of attack in various

writings long before Taslima's emergence. In that sense, one response of Bangladeshi readership has been to acknowledge Taslima and allow her the voice of protest. Yet she is too troubling for many readers' sensibility. She defies assimilation into the Bangladeshi discourse of social criticism through her strangeness, so to speak, to the tradition of that discourse at least in two ways: by her provocative assertion of female sexuality leading to female empowerment, and through her uniquely aggressive style which is employed to celebrate the transgression of her writings.[20] She writes:

I adore to proclaim that I am a fallen woman in the eyes of this society. . . . The first condition for purification of a woman is to become 'fallen' (in the eyes of this society). Unless a woman becomes 'fallen,' there is no way she can liberate herself from the clutch of this society. She is the real sane and admirable person, whom people call 'fallen.'[21]

By declaring herself "nastya" or "fallen" Taslima calls into question the patriarchal formulation of the categories of good and bad woman. Taslima builds an alliance with the downtrodden by giving herself the title fallen. A fallen woman in Taslima's economy is the one who initiates the agenda of claiming her rights (no matter how "immodest" it is), of defining herself and her sexual desire in her own terms as a subject, of rejecting male protection as oppressive and exploitative, of transforming society for her own emancipation. By the same token, a woman who upholds the notion of "purification" only contributes to her own subordination and self-effacement. Taslima makes it clear that it is self-deceiving to claim "purity" and maintain the facade of a "happy" family life when a woman knows that it is based on the ashes of her dreams.[22]Taslima believes in pushing the prescribed parameters of modesty to reappropriate power from the Bangladeshi male.

[27] Although no extensive study of Taslima's stories has been published in the existing literature, at least one of the critics, Ranajit Das, has offered an interesting analysis. Das concedes that Taslima has largely been successful in identifying the problems of gender discrimination in Bangladeshi society. But simultaneously, he argues and cautions that the nature of the resolution of these problems as demonstrated by the heroines of Taslima's novels is unethical and morally degrading. In his critique ofAparpokkho, he contends that Jamuna, the central female character of the novel, through her choice of having a child outside the marital bond with her husband, violates the ethics of the family. Her ethical responsibility is towards her husband. Das argues that Taslima's female characters fail to uplift the reader's moral sense through their failure to follow the ideology of "ethical motherhood."[23] What Das fails to acknowledge, along with other critics, is that ethical motherhood and morality defined by patriarchy are pillars to perpetuate female subjugation. While he agrees that there are some problems of gender inequality, he ignores that these problems are systematic. One cannot bring about changes by moving around some bricks and leaving the structure alone.

[28] According to the patriarchal view of morality, women have to live a spiritual life and give over the material world for men to negotiate. Within this moral economy, women's suffering is ennobled, and is considered to be the foundation of family life. I depart from such a moral criticism of Taslima's work and engage in an analysis from a different set of concerns. It is the politics of power-deprivation of the female embedded in ethical motherhood which will propel my inquiry, and as a result my empathy is with Taslima's heroines. The practicability of what Jhumur and Jamuna, the two heroines of her stories, do with their bodies may be problematic, but my study concentrates on the measure of challenge such heroines propose through their lives. Fatima Mernissi has aptly noted "Curbing active female sexuality, preventing female sexual self-determination, is the basis of many of Islam's family institutions."[24] The pivotal

importance of Taslima's novels is the heroine's ability to reclaim the power over her body, tearing apart the ethical cover-up of the subordinating practices of Bangladeshi patriarchy.

The Subalternized Woman and Bangladeshi Patriarchy in Taslima's Stories

[29] In order to further explore and contextualize Taslima's works within the indigenous critical literature, we need to glance at her canon. Some of the important and popularly known writings of Taslima include poetical works such as Aamar Kichu Jai Ashena (I am Fearless, 1990); Baleekar Gollachute (Girls' Play, 1992);Jabona Keno Jabo ? (Why Shall I not Go? 1992); non-fictions such as Nirbachita Column (Selected Columns, 1993), and fictional works like Lajja and Chaar Kannya (a collection of Shodh,Aparpokkho,Bhramar Kayya Gia and Nimontron,1994).

[30] In Taslima's representations, the female body, far from being mangled (as in "Breast Giver") is not only intact, but always a site of abundant energy and desire enabling us to ask whether it must be locked in a space of non-enunciation.[25] At the end of "Breast Giver," Jashoda lay dying and "the sores on her breast kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes."[26] Unlike Jashoda, the heroines of Taslima's novels experience ecstasy and pleasure simultaneously as they engage in subverting the agenda of their husbands. For example, in Shodh, Jhumur is transfigured by her sexual experience with Afzal, a man other than her husband. At the same time she makes herself pregnant by him in order to subvert patriineality.

[31] It is important to underscore that in her novels, Taslima's attack is consistently directed against the middle class, the professional, and the power elite. She points out that we can no longer relegate the problem of polygamy and desertion of women to the village, its peers (religious figures) or the peasant men who inhabit a rather subordinate rank in the chain of patriarchy. Taslima attacks where the attack is overdue. The middle class man, neither unenlightened, nor prejudicial, is brought to the spotlight as the practitioner of patriarchal oppression. InAparpokkho and Shodh, the heroines' adversaries are such men– they are not religious figures but rather secular elites.

[32] Written in an epistolary form, Aparpokkho (meaning the opponent) traces the life of Jamuna who is divorced from her husband Saber, for allegedly having an illicit relationship with Saber's friend. Now reduced to the position of further devaluation, on account of her divorce, Jamuna remarries. Unhappy with her second husband, she becomes passionately involved with a lover and conceives. She boldly decides to have the baby and envisions a child outside of patrilineal descent.

[33] The story in Aparpokkho, narrated by Jamuna to her sister, represents Jamuna's shifting predicament, and her progressively intensifying struggle as she goes through marriage and divorce. Her story documents the failure of the institution of marriage to protect women in a culture which is based on a concept of women's dependence on the male protector. It also foregrounds the failure of the legal reforms on polygamy and divorce laws to empower women within the existing socio-cultural and ideological condition of Bangladesh. Finally, Aparpokkho uses the female body and the maternal womb (of Jamuna) as a site of contestation and challenge to the system of patrilineal

descent which organizes Bangladeshi patriarchy. By transforming the womb into a material site, Taslima undoes the foundational basis of Bangladeshi patriarchy.

[34] The text of Aparpokkho, through its chronology, creates a paradigm within which marriage is a sign syntagmatically connected to polygamy, and divorce and displacement of a woman foregrounds the exploitative nature of marriage and divorce.[27] The narrative contiguity of directly discordant themes like marriage and divorce or the juxtaposition of such opposing motifs creates a jagged feeling and brings to focus some discomforting questions. Such a paradigm calls into question the sanctity of marriage by wrenching the sign out of its affective predication and idealization (super-adequation).[28] For example, the womb in this patriarchal economy is viewed as a site of reproduction through which patrilineal descent is perpetuated. Through her chastity, a woman protects the womb which is instrumental in ensuring proper descent and family lineage. In other words, a woman can (re)produce children by her lawful husband. Patriarchy's purpose of patrilineal validation through the female womb functions in conjunction with the ideological concept of motherhood celebrated through its cultural production as one of extraordinary affect and self-effacing love. Taslima abandons this patriarchally-delegated position, and contests its agenda by first foregrounding, and then destabilizing the patriarchal function of womb utilization for perpetuating proper male descent.

[35] She questions the ideal of marriage which is considered a sacred institution in Bangladeshi society. The concept of marriage is sublimated as an eternal bond. In Taslima's writings marriage is represented as exploitative, and it inevitably ends in divorce preceded by the husband's polygamous marriage. It is through the perspective of a displaced woman (Jamuna) that the institutions and practices of marriage and divorce are examined and critiqued in Taslima's text. Taslima's strategy is to use the daily events in the micrology of the domestic as premises for a logical argument and as evidence for the conclusion that subordination and economic exploitation of women are embedded in patriarchal marital relationships.

[36] One day Humayun, Jamuna's second husband, demands his food, but Jamuna remains motionless. Taslima offers the following dialogue:

Humayun asks, "Give me rice."

I said, "I didn't cook."

"What?"

"I didn't cook means I didn't cook."

"Why?"

"I did not want to."[29]
The above exchange between Jamuna and Humayun may have the appearance of a domestic quarrel, but it inaugurates a discourse for women that the conventional episteme has not allowed so far. Neither does a woman respond to the inequality in the domestic setting with such simple but bold language against convention. In other words, Taslima puts new words in the married woman's mouth that is purported to unsettle the sign of marriage which signifies that woman's desires are subservient to that of man. The renunciation of female desire is the prerequisite for a successful marriage. In her anger,

she realizes that the Bengali word for husband also means god, a transcendental signifier. Humayun is a "shaami," not a friend and, therefore, is hierarchically superior to her. Such a position forecloses the possibility of equality between them.

[37] During her first marriage, Jamuna wanted to have sole entitlement to her income. But such a proposal undermines Saber's authority, becomes counter to Jamuna's dependent status which is a precondition of marital happiness.

[38] In Bangladesh, muslim marriage has to be registered by filling out a contract by both parties. In this regard, the Registration form of the 1974 marriage Act, with its twenty five columns provides an interesting insight. In column 17 of this marriage form, a list of conditions is documented that the bridegroom has to abide by during his marriage. (Sometimes that column remains blank–meaning that the bridegroom disallows any rights to the bride at least in the formality of the contract.)

[39] In my survey of thirty marriage forms (from one county), the conditions listed in column 17 show that there is uniformity in the language phrasing these conditions. It says that the bridegroom will not abuse the bride, will support her every month, will fulfill her rights (not specified as to which rights) and so on. Such a discursively framed legal treatment of the woman presupposes that she has no economic resources or no access to income.

[40] In the context of Jamuna's plight, what then are Jamuna's rights regarding her income? The marriage contract has no guidelines for that. When Jamuna claims the right to her income, Saber considers such a demand on her part equivalent to her committing adultery, and tries to circulate the story that Jamuna has an illicit affair with his friend which may disqualify her to remain his wife.

[41] At this critical juncture, a scene follows in which Jamuna witnesses Saber's return with a new wife for whom she had to yield her own marital bed. Saber's polygamous marriage duly prepares the scene afterwards for Jamuna's forced exit.

[42] Polygamy, even today, is a legalized institution in Bangladesh. The attempt to modify such laws has only helped in perpetuating it. According to 1961 Muslim Family Law Ordinance, the husband has to obtain permission from his first wife before marrying a new woman.[30] Since women are subalternized in the familial structure, this new requirement can be fulfilled through coercion, and violence or threat of violence. A subaltern or subalternized woman will rarely want to undergo divorce, desertion or defamation, and may agree to her own devaluation by allowing her husband to be polygamous. Furthermore, an unregistered marriage is not considered void in Bangladeshi society.

[43] In the context of this story, we see that for Saber, law poses no barrier against his polygamous marriage. First of all, for Jamuna, the immediate concern is to secure an alternative space now that her position is more unstable. Divorce for her may be imminent as well. In such cases, a woman would rarely initiate legal battles about the violation of Marriage laws by her husband. A subaltern woman normally would stay in the marriage along with co-wives (she cannot support herself independently). Although polygamy is not a dominant practice, it certainly strengthens male control over women of all classes. In one of her essays, Taslima challenges the Bangladeshi law-makers to raise a bill so that there can be "No marriage, contracted by any male person of the 'Muslim' religion, who has a wife alive."[31]

[44] Renewed by his polygamous marriage, Saber declares his divorce intentions at this point. Polygamy makes it possible for one woman to police the eviction of another. One's coming is syntagmatically connected to the other's going. Once divorced, Jamuna is driven to marry Humayun as she says: "I yielded my guardianship to man [through marriage] so that no one finds a chink to fix their suspicious glance at me"

[45] Aparpokkho is ultimately Taslima's vote of no confidence to the patriarchal institution of marriage, and a bold critique of the institution of divorce. Jamuna, in the absence of Humayun, experiences ecstatic pleasure with Pasha, and she decides to have the resulting child. The political significance of her choice lies in her refusal to abort the baby and in her bold articulation of that choice to her sister. Through initiating such an agenda, she offers a challenging alternative to the system of descent that controls the legitimate space of Bangladeshi society ensuring the subordination of women. At the end of the story, although she already apprehends the gloom of ostracization approaching her from all sides; she ends by appealing to her sister for an alliance against societal judgment. Jamuna announces with determination: "I want a child over whom man has no entitlement. . . . Like me, my child will be free of the offensive control of patriarchy"(63). Jamuna's reply to the intrusive inquiry of her neighbor about the paternity of the unborn child is: "I'm nobody's land for cultivation, nor can a man use me as he wishes. . . ." (66). This is Taslima's deliberate violation of the dominant episteme of which religion constitutes an important part. The Quran recommends to men: "Your women are a tilth (to cultivate) for you, so go to your tilth as ye will, . . ."[32]Taslima directly opposes such male privileges through her articulation.

[46] In Shodh, Taslima's resistance to patriarchal marriage "rites" is brought into focus. Illegitimate pregnancy still figures as a key theme in this story. But the politics of such a pregnancy is covert as opposed to her overt position in Aparpokkho. Shodh (Getting Even) is the story of the compulsory transformation of a girl into a wife and her angry revenge. The story explores the institution of marriage, its regulatory structure of surveillance and subordination. In this story, Taslima provides a critical examination of the initiation "rites" of marriage, and the effacement of the female subject through those rites. Jhumur, the central character in Shodh, subverts the patriarchal agenda of appropriation and effacement of the female by conceiving a child outside of marriage, and passing him off as her husband, Harun's legitimate son. Through her covert strategies, Jhumur tries to undo the Bangladeshi patrilineal society by planting deceit at its heart.

[47] One of the recurrent themes in Bangladeshi literature is the transformation of a girl who initially embodies the spirit of freedom, into a "normal wife" through the rites of marriage, so that the girl happily relinquishes exploration of life on her own terms and follows the new program of renunciation to achieve the status of a good wife. Taslima in Shodh calls into question such marriage rites and turns them into an object of deconstructive challenge to foreground the politics of that program (of rites). Naila Kabeer has very nicely summed up the itinerary of a new bride as programmed by the patriarchal agenda:

[In marriage] she is sent as a young and inexperienced bride into a stranger's household where her behaviour is viewed with suspicion until she has been successfully integrated into the new household and has learnt to identify with its interests.

[In marriage] she is sent as a young and inexperienced bride into a stranger's household where her behaviour is viewed with suspicion until she has been successfully integrated into the new household and has learnt to identify with its interests.[33]

[48] So Jhumur finds after her marriage that her relationship to her parents has suddenly altered. According to the patriarchal norm "she is called not by her name, but bou (bride) of a certain man, a certainbari (house) or a certain poribar (family)."[34] Harun says with complacency:

Your name has changed now! You're Mrs. Harun Rahman. You're now bhabi of Hasan, Habib and Dolon, and a bou of the house. Your address is no longer Waree but Dhanmondi Residential Area; since you are the bou of this house, you cannot hang around the city as before. (135)

[49] Marriage for Jhumur takes on the characteristic of penance for being a woman. In return, patriarchy will legitimize her position as a good wife. Taslima in her denunciatory discourse against such practices has named such patriarchal strategies assangsartantra (257). Sangsartantra can be translated as domesticism or familiarchy. Sangsar is a very material term, and it has a complex signification. It may mean a family; it also signifies the material world or mundane life. Sometimes it is associated with worldliness which fetters the spirit. It may also mean a wife through her association with the mundane life of the domestic sphere, but never a husband. A sangsari who can postpone or sacrifice immediate satisfaction for future prosperity is prized for her thriftiness. Taslima, in her oppositional discourse, by callingsangsar a "tantra" or "ism" identifies the systematic oppression of women imbricated in the ideology and practices of Bangladeshi marriage "rites." In such a reading, the story of Jhumur's subordination in the Harun family becomes representative of the system rather than an isolated incident. By foregrounding the mechanism of patriarchal supremacy in the family, Taslima brings to scrutiny areas of subjugated knowledges.These initiatory "rites" of marriage also require that Jhumur be alienated from her natal family. Harun wonders annoyingly,"Why do you need to go to Waree [Jamuna's parents live in Waree]? You now belong to this place; this is your habitat. It is not right to insist on visiting your parents so often" (147).

[50] Affect plays a contingent, tentative, and conditional role in such marriage. Making the in-law family happy is instrumental in gaining the affection of a husband. In one scene, Harun says in a tender voice, "try to win their [my family] hearts. It will be your success. Isn't it your obligation to make this sangsar your own?" (148). In this regard, Spivak's theorization about the effacement of the female subject is important. In her critique of the Subaltern Studies work on communal modes of power, Spivak has pointed out how a programmed effacement of the female through marriage structures patriarchal power in Indian society. Although her context is the Subaltern history of India in the pre-capitalist world, her theorization has relevance for Taslima's work. In Spivak's language, "the figure of the woman moving from clan to clan, and family to family as daughter/sister/wife/mother syntaxes patriarchal continuity even as she is herself drained of proper identity." Patriarchal power, she argues, bases itself on "the dissimulation of her discontinuity, on the repeated emptying of her meaning as instrument."[35]

[51] In Shodh, by removing the veil of affect from the marital relationship, Taslima engages in foregrounding the politics of that relationship and that institution. The dubious status of affect in this story underscores the power relations that underlie the Bangladeshi ideology of marriage. It is important to note here that in Mahasweta's "Breast Giver,"

mothering is exploded out of "affective coding" through Jashoda's gruesome death which remains unacknowledged by any of her children. But in Taslima's stories, marriage itself is divested of the romanticism utilized to seduce the imagination of Bengali women. The focus on the structure of domination and exploitation in marriage destroys the affect that mystifies marriage for Bengali men and women.

[52] In a patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal marriage in Shodh, the surveillance of Jhumur's chastity is crucially important to Harun in order to ensure proper descent. After one and a half months of marriage, as Jhumur finds out that she is pregnant, and turns to Harun for affection, and approval, he responds with displeasure and distrust and denies that it is his child. A pregnancy immediately after marriage, in Harun's view, is the result of pre-marital relationship with someone else. (Didn't Jhumur attend the University with other young men?) He decides that the baby should be aborted. As a male, it is Harun's prerogative to define and institute what is licit and illicit as it suits his paranoiac fear of the educated woman and her will to autonomy.

[53] Driven by anger and pain, and determined to take revenge, Jhumur secretly makes love to an artist named Afzal (her neighbor) and appropriates the right to her body. She describes with passionate intensity her love for Afzal. Jhumur becomes pregnant again, but on her own terms (this pregnancy Harun considers late enough to be caused by him), and establishes her legitimacy by giving birth to a son. The affect of a mother or the prospect of a boy or a girl does not move Jhumur, as she says, "this is not my desired baby. This is the baby of protest and revenge. . . . The foetus of pain and agony" (181).

An Epistemic Violation: The First Person Singular in Taslima's Writings

[54] Jhumur and Jamuna become the spokespersons of the author, Taslima, in the first person narratives of Shodh andAparpokkho. Their complete defiance of patriarchal prohibitions against illegitimate pregnancy derives its power from the narrator/ author whose passion for change against the system of patrilineality is wellknown through her non-fictional writings. Focusing on the ideological significance of her first person technique, Taslima herself explains, "Time and again, I come back to my stories; and I intend to because I'm a woman. I speak to every woman through my experience, my awareness and myvision" (emphasis mine).[36] In this regard Riaz comments:

Nasreen feels comfortable in writing in the first person. . . . Most of the time she deals with issues pertaining to oppression, harassment,and the like. To say that 'I' have been subjected to harassment is to expose the self. In Bangladesh society, the common wisdom is to distance oneself from unpleasant events. . . By reconstructing and rearticulating her own and other women's experiences of humiliation, abuse, and discrimination . . . Nasreen connects the personal (or social) identity to the larger context of social relations.[37]>

As Riaz has pointed out, Taslima clearly violates the dominant narrative tradition by using the first person in talking about her sexual and family problems in public.

[55] Stylistically, Taslima's deliberate and bold use of the first person narrative against the embarrassing micropractices of Bangladeshi patriarchy sets her apart as a writer. In

Bangladesh, a social critique is usually launched in the third person objective style. Taslima's narratives and poems are more compelling and all the more threatening for her first person characterization. The threat is that if a female physician/writer can speak in the first person, it will enable other elite women to come out and speak in the first person about their shame, their experiences of male oppression. As a result, the middle class home will turn into a site of confusion and undoing of the male.

[56] Taslima observes that Bangladeshi women who submit to male domination live a deceitful life. It is that very self-deception that she strikes against by writing stories in personal terms. While Bangladeshi women might share their life stories in private, public articulation is not a choice. Taslima's narratives might motivate others to make that choice.

[57] In Taslima's work, the first person narrator has multiple personae. Sometimes she is a doctor looking at a patient who has been coerced by her husband into an abortion, or a member of an intellectual group (which includes famous names in Bangladeshi society) encountering sexist views on her own writings or a wife struggling against an imprisoning life. However, what unifies all her work is the compelling agenda of bringing Bangladeshi patriarchy to a serious scrutiny. And never does she abandon that project. The recurrence of the first person narrator with her relentless focus on gender issues demands the attention of the reader and disturbs his/her sense of complacency. The "I" in Taslima's work is the name of a political platform.

[58] As Taslima points out, most Bangladeshi female authors write about love and familial happiness. The story of gender oppression evades them. In this regard Fazlul Huq Rippon comments, "it is in accordance with tradition that a woman should write about her experiences ingratiatingly, with modesty-clad words, and not represent man as her opponent."[38] Taslima rejects the ingratiating style violating the epistemic tradition. One of the important poems that constitutes the Bengali imagination is "Natorer Banalata Sen" by Jibanada Das. Das defines and identifies the Bengali woman as the eternally waiting, loving/serene figure bequeathing home to the age old wanderer-the Bengali man. Taslima contrasts that passive image by speaking for herself, voicing her own demands and calling into question the exploitative ideology of that romanticized home.

[59] Shodh and Aparpokkho cannot be read in isolation from her non-fictional works (which are also full of anecdotal elements). She is an activist in her non-fictional writings calling upon women to rise against their subordination. She challenges women : "If you are human, you will smash your chain to stand tall. Smash the chains with your hands; these hands are yours. . . ."[39] Shodh andAparpokkho bear the imprint of that activist "I" of the newspaper columns. The burning pain of Taslima's personal suffering breathes life into her writings. She deliberately rejects the third person narrative voice of omniscience typically used in Bangladeshi literature; she reinvents her narrative voice as a woman. Although Taslima is from an elite class, subalternized women of her inquiry are not her other; by utilizing the first person technique, she emphasizes that she is also the other in a patriarchal society.

The Maternal Womb: Taslima and Spivak

[60] In Shodh, the material womb, a signifier of male control, and patriarchal continuity has been appropriated by Jhumur to show how the surveillance fails to safeguard its

interests. The entire system malfunctions when Jhumur appropriates power covertly, and renders the surveillance futile.

[61] Within a patriarchal ideology, a woman's sexuality is instrumental for reproductive purposes, and after giving birth to children, especially sons, she rises in her status in society (for example as mother-in-law) and commands some respect for transcending the ordeal of her early phase of life. Taslima's work counters such representations by following the trajectory of female desire and deconstructing the image of the desexualized good wife. In other words, Taslima renounces the conventional image by enunciating female desire.

[62] In her reading of "Breast Giver," Spivak employs Marxist Feminism to theorize Jashoda's body. Spivak interrupts Marxist Feminism itself by inserting new significations as she focuses on the exchange value of Jashoda's milk. In order to produce breast milk, Jashoda undergoes repeated pregnancies. Thus the female womb in Mahasweta's story is a means to produce milk which in turn earns a livelihood for Jashoda. Spivak argues, Jashoda's selling of excess milk to the Haldar family for exchange value "introduces a stutter in the pre-supposition that women's work is typically non-productive of value."[40] She explains that the womb is utilized in "Breast Giver" for exchange value which goes beyond the reproductive rights of the Western feminists raising new areas of interrogation.

[63] Whereas in Spivak, the womb figures only as a means to reach the final product–breast milk to which a price value is added, in my critique of Taslima's stories, the focus on the female womb as a signifier is more direct. Taslima has inserted in the liberal feminist struggle a new dimension by conceiving babies outside of the sanctioned space to contest patrilineality and patriarchal heritage. She has brought to the forefront women like Jhumur and Jamuna as legitimate figures in spite of their reappropriation of the womb from the hegemonic order. Taslima, through such an approach, has moved beyond reproductive rights to contest the system itself, and to undermine the system's foundation. In the economy of her stories, the womb is transformed so that conception takes place as a strategic move to destabilize patriarchy. Although in Aparpokkho, Jamuna's decision to keep the illegitimate baby instead of aborting it falls within the purview of Reproductive rights as conceived in the West, her political agenda encompasses much more than a claim to the product of her own body. Her womb is not (only) a site of reproduction in that sense.

[64] The context of Taslima's writings is a Muslim society which considers female desire as enticing and destructive; hence the need to veil women or to promote the idea of family honor which revolves around protecting women's virginity (before marriage) and chastity (after marriage). In this regard, Mernissi comments, "while Western women's liberation movements had to repudiate the body in pornographic mass media, Muslim women are likely to claim the right to their bodies as part of their liberation movement."[41]Taslima's reappropriation of the womb in a Muslim society is groundbreaking in many ways. The children that her heroines conceive outside of marriage are also the products of passionate relationships with men other than their husbands. These children thus give permanence to the transgressive desire of her heroines in a Muslim society which is based on the regulation of female sex, specifically in the family unit. Purdah, modesty and family honor all originate from the fear of female sexuality and the need to establish patrilineality. Taslima strikes at this very foundation of a Muslim family. For example, in Shodh, the child who becomes an heir to Harun's property is not his own. In this novel, Taslima utilizes female sexuality to subvert the

system of inheritance. In Western feminism, reproductive rights can be considered in terms of equality of choice and rights to one's body; Taslima's enunciation of the womb is aimed at disrupting the order of patrilineal descent in Bangladeshi society.

[65] One possible approach to the issue of the reappropriated womb in these stories is to read conception as metaphoric. Taslima might be suggesting that we, through our desires, should conceive of new alternatives, that our liberated desire should define our goals. The yet-to-be born baby in Aparpokkho may be metaphoric of embryonic ideas represented for further expansion, elaboration and espousal.

[66] Her strong social and professional identity validate her embryonic ideas. Taslima's fictions gain power from her public position as a professional in the field of medical science. Specifically, if her fictional writings are read against the backdrop of her newspaper columns, one is likely to hear the resonance of the powerful observer/doctor writing about the female patients and their devaluation by social gendering based on misconception and unscientificity. For example, in one of her newspaper articles, Taslima reveals that many childless couples come to her for medical help to cure barrenness. Categorically, it is the wife who is targeted for treatment by the husband and the in-law family. In defiance of the norms of modesty and courtesy to men, Taslima then announces that she diagnosed many of these men to be impotent and found them responsible for the childlessness in their families.[42]

[67] Such a bold exposure of a fact certainly emboldens other women to come forward to deflate the balloon of power held by men who promote silence and ignorance in the area of reproduction but exercise power to ensure the patrilineal identity of children. By bringing the most personal and mystified realm of life such as reproduction to such a scrutiny, Taslima deals a good blow to the unequal foundation of gendering. She shows how no social taboo should befall "barren" women. The narrator of her novels bears the authorizing mark of that columnist /doctor endowing her stories with a seal of extra-fictional validity.

[68] If the major pillars of an exploitative system are called into question, it may help dethrone the middle class man; the middle class man is robbed of his good name by these stories. The husbands of Shodh andAparpokkho live in cities and they are neither mollahs nor uneducated village men.

[69] Taslima has challenged the unassailability of Bangladeshi patriarchy by instituting fear in the system, and by introducing terminologies of revenge and oppositionality in the realm of domestic relationships. Taslima has shown that the patriarchal institutions and customs of Bangladeshi society constitute the armor for the contending male rendering the female helpless. By unveiling the patriarchal agenda of subordinating women, and by introducing overt and covert strategies to subvert this agenda, Taslima has pioneered the feminist discourse in Bangladeshi society. Simultaneously, her work opens up areas for new exploration and debate in postcolonial feminist studies.

Notes

I owe special thanks to Mary Cappello and Jean Walton for their encouragement and insightful comments on the earlier versions of this essay. I also wish to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers of GENDERS for their suggestions.

1. 1. For an English translation of this novel, see Shaukat Osman,Janani, trans. Osman Jamal (Oxford: Heinemann,1993). back
2. According to Gayatri Spivak, an example of epistemic violence is the imperial "project to constitute the colonial subject as Other." In the context of widow burning, as Spivak has pointed out, the discourse of Sati exemplifies epistemic violence. Epistemologically, the colonial discourse considers the widow an object or a victim (object-formation) of Brown patriarchy, whereas the nativist account (subject- constitution) represents her as a willing participant in this ritual. Both are complicit, maintains Spivak, in effacing the voice (the possibility of an episteme by the subaltern) of the subaltern woman through appropriation. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 280-81; 297; 306. back
3. According to Ranajit Guha's formulation, the subaltern population of India represents the "demographic difference between the total Indian population" and the elite class. Quoted in Gayatri Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (New York: Routledge,1988), 204. I argue that women of Bangladesh inhabit the subaltern space of powerlessness irrespective of classes, although the degree of subalternization may vary. back
4. Quoted in Hayden White, "Michel Foucault," Structuralism and Since: From LeviStrauss to Derrida, ed. John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 94. back
5. Rabia Bhuiyan, Aspects of Violence Against Women (Dhaka: Institute of Democratic Rights, 1991), 51. back
6. S.M. Shamsul Alam, "Women in the Era of Modernity and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Case of Taslima Nasrin of Bangladesh," Signs 23 (1998): 431. back
7. For a detailed discussion, see Robert Young, White Mythologies: Writing History and the West (New York: Routledge,1990), 160. back
8. For a detailed account, see Rabia Bhuiyan, Bibaha o Bibaha-Bichhede Muslim Narir Aingoto Adhikar(Dhaka: Women for Women, 1986). Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Bengali texts are my own. back
9. Mojibor Rahman, Muslim o Paribarik Ain Parichiti (Dhaka: Badsha Publishers, 1989), 84. back
10. See Bhuiyan, Bibaha o Bibaha Bichhede, 7. back
11. Quoted in Taslima Nasrin, Nirbachita Column (Dhaka: Gyan Koshe Prakashani, 1993; reprint, 1994), 77. back
12. Taslima Nasrin, Nastya Meyer Nastya Gaddya (Dhaka: Kakali Prakashani, 1992, reprint, 1994), 99. back
13. Nasrin, Column, 12. back
14. Naila Kabeer, "Subordination and Struggle: Women in Bangladesh," New Left Review 168 (April/May, 1988), 104. back
15. See Naila Kabeer, "The Quest for National Identity: Women, Islam and the State in Bangladesh," Women, Islam and the State, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 115-143. back
16. Meer Nurul Islam, "Bhinnya Dristir Annyarakam Akjon Kabi,"Taslima Nasriner Pakkhe Bipakkhe, vol. 1 [2 vols.], ed. Mesbahuddin Ahmed, (Dhaka: Ankur Prakashani, 1993), 89. back
17. Islam, "Bhinnya Dristir," 90. back
18. Quoted in Taslima Nasriner Pakkhe Bipakkhe, vol.2, 21. back
19. Ali Riaz, Voice and Silence: Contextualizing Taslima Nasrin(Dhaka: Ankur Prakashani, 1995), 39. back
20. Riaz has used the term "strangeness" in reference to Taslima's writings. Riaz has also been observant of the first person style of Taslima's writings and the critical importance of female sexuality in her work (75). back
21. Quoted in Riaz, Voice and Silence, 69. back

22. Nasrin, Nastya Meyer Nastya, 11. back
23. Ranajit Das, Taslima Nasriner Nari (Dhaka: Mamuni Prakashan, 1993),75. back
24. Fatima Mernissi, Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 60. back
25. Alam has adequately pointed out, "Nasrin does not view the body as a biological entity; rather, she attempts to unwrap the socio-cultural meaning of the female body, especially the historical configurations of male-female power relations to which the female body in Bangladesh is subjected" (453). My essay in addressing those power-relations particularly focuses on the Bangladeshi personal law of marriage and divorce which can be considered the primary site of female subordination. back
26. Quoted in Spivak, In Other Worlds, 260. back
27. In the Sassurean system, any sign's value is determined by its syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationship with other signs in a particular signifying system (which may vary, for example, from culture to culture). A syntagmatic relationship denotes formal contiguity: for example, a sentence connects different words which are formally contiguous. In Kaja Silverman's language, "A word depends for its value, and hence its significance, both on its immediate neighbors and on its location within the linear organization of the sentence in which it appears." In my example, the syntagmatic character of the sign is not a grammatical sentence, but signs and concepts "chained together" to create a linear narrative. The working of a syntagmatic device in a story can be illuminated by comparing it to similar devices in cinema or painting. For example, "the spatial disposition of objects in a painting. . .establishes a syntagmatic connection between them. . . ." The Subject of Semiotics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 105; 106. I am also indebted to Spivak for this idea which she utilizes to analyze women's position in the pre-capitalist society of India. Spivak, In Other Worlds, 219. back
28. From the Marxist point of view, labor is idealized in capitalism through the idea of superadequation-meaning the laborer can produce much more than he needs (or what is called necessary labor). Similarly, I would argue that the image of the mother as supremely giving points to the exploitative notion of superadequation that may be embedded in it. For more on the idea of super-adequation, see, Gayatri Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," The Spivak Reader, eds, Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York: Routledge, 1996), 107-40. It is also important to mention here that in her analysis of Mahasweta Devi's "Breast Giver," Spivak observes that the figure of Jashoda "blasts mothering right out of its affective coding." TheSpivak Reader, 165. back
29. Taslima Nasrin, Chaar Kannya (Dhaka: Pearl Publications, 1994), 43. All further references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text. back
30. See Bhuyian, Bibha o Bibaha-Bichhede, 4. back
31. Nasrin, Column, 141. back
32. Quoted in Nasrin, Column, 129. back
33. Kabeer, "Subordination," 102. back
34. Naseem Ahmed, Women in Bangladesh, Universities Field Staff International, 36 (Indianapolis: UFS, 1987), 2. back
35. Spivak, In Other Worlds, 220. back
36. Nasrin, Column, 102. back
37. Riaz, Voice and Silence, 82. back
38. Fazlul Huq Rippon, "Taslima Nasrin: Kayekti Parzabekkhon,"Taslima Nasriner Pakkhe Bipakkhe, vol.2, 88. back
39. Nasrin, Column, 104. back
40. Spivak, In Other Worlds, 249. back
41. Mernissi, Beyond, 168. back
42. Nasrin, Column, 95. back

Taslima Nasrin: A Background Paper

by Meredith Tax, Chair, International PEN Women Writers' Committee, New York, 5 November 1993*

Taslima Nasrin, thirty-one, is a Bangladeshi poet, novelist, and feminist journalist. Because of her writing she has been condemned by a Muslim fundamentalist group that put a price on her head and organized mass mobilizations in Dhaka aimed at her death or imprisonment. Nasrin lives in Dhaka and is unable to leave because the government has confiscated her passport. International action is required to save Nasrin's life and secure her rights.

Until this year, Nasrin was known mainly for her poems and her newspaper columns, which often focus on the condition of women and the role of religion in their oppression. Her most recent novel, *Lajja* (Shame), tackles an even more taboo subject, communal discrimination and hatred. *Lajja* describes events in Bangladesh following the December 1992 destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, India, which led to two months of communal riots during which two thousand people were killed. As Nasrin puts it:

> While Hindu fanatics were killing innocent Muslims, Islamic fanatics were killing Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh. As a human being, I tried to show how a Hindu family was persecuted by Muslim fanatics in Bangladesh. I also wrote that the administration was of no help to the minority Hindus. . . . I tried to say, shame to all dark aspects of fundamentalism. In the book I said, let's uphold humanism instead of using religion to kill each other.

Released in February during Bangladesh's biggest book fair, *Lajja* won critical acclaim and sold fifty thousand copies in six months. But Islamic fundamentalists considered the book blasphemous and unpatriotic, and a group of them even threatened to assault her at the fair. In July, after months of pressure, the Bangladeshi government banned the book on the grounds that it had "created misunderstanding between communities." The ban, seen as a sign of the growing influence of religious extremists, was publicly protested by many writers and human rights activists.

According to Bangladeshi women's rights organizations, there has recently been a noticeable increase in crimes of violence against women as *salish* (religious) courts have begun to take the law into their own hands, going back to punishments outlawed for many years. In January a newly married couple in Sylhet was buried chest deep and stoned for *zina* (adultery) because the woman had previously been divorced; in May a woman in Madhukhal was burned at the stake, also for *zina.* In response to such events, Nasrin's newspaper columns became more militant. On 1 September 1993, a *salish* court in Kaligani, led by the superintendent of the local *madrassah* (religious school), condemned a sixteen-year-old girl to being publicly beaten with 101 lashes; she had been accused of having an affair with a Hindu boy. After the beating, the girl died, allegedly a suicide. Taslima Nasrin called upon the government to indict the *mullahs* (Muslim teachers and interpreters of religious law) involved for premeditated murder.

On 16 September five hundred members of the Bangladesh Sahaba Sainik Parishad or Council of Soldiers for Islam (CSI), a militant group based in *a madrassah* in Sylhet, held a rally calling for Nasrin to be executed by the end of the month for "blasphemy and conspiracy against Islam, the Holy Koran, and its prophet." On 23 September they offered a bounty of $1,250 for her death within fifteen days. On 2 October they staged another march, this time threatening a general strike in Sylhet on 7 October unless she were arrested by that time. Strikes aimed at individuals are unprecedented in Bangladesh. The CSI also demanded the arrest of another prominent feminist poet, Begum Sofia Kemal, who is eighty years old, along with three male intellectuals, Ahmed Sharif, Kabir Chowdhury, and Sayedur Rahman, all of whom stand for the separation of church and state.

Nasrin appealed for police protection. She was denied it on the grounds that such a request would have to come from the home secretary. She approached the home secretary to no avail. Having no other recourse, she went to court. On 7 October the chief metropolitan magistrate ordered an investigation into the activities of the CSI and ordered the police to protect Nasrin. The police did not respond. Only on 20 October were two policemen finally stationed at Nasrin's home; according to Bangladeshi human rights activists, this was in response to letters from Amnesty International and the Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN.

On 21 October clerics who lead the CSI held a press conference in Dhaka to announce they were spreading the campaign against Nasrin throughout the country. They set 18 November as the date for mass mobilization in Dhaka to demand that the government execute her; if the government did not do so, they would try her by the Shariat (a body of Islamic law) in their own court. This is illegal, but the government has not been prosecuting such offenses. They also

*On 9 November 1991 the Assembly of International PEN voted to establish a Women Writers' Committee to enable women writers to know one another and act together to defend human rights. This committee aims to amplify the voices of women internationally by encouraging translation, initiating cultural developments, and resisting censorship. It now has members in over forty countries and has begun to publish a biannual newsletter, *Network/Le Réseau/La Red.*

Writer Taslim Nasrin with three dolls of working women that are usually on her desk in her home in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It is hard to believe that this is someone whose writing has so enraged some Muslims that they put a price on her head and have marched fifty thousand–strong to demand that she be tried for blasphemy, a crime they feel should be punishable by death. The International PEN Writers' Committee has organized a campaign calling on Bangladesh to protect Nasrin, prosecute those who have sought her death, lift the ban from her book, and restore her passport, which was confiscated in January 1993. This photo is by Saibal Das, and it is from India Today, *15 December 1993, p. 91, reprinted here courtesy of Saibal Das and* India Today.

announced the inauguration of a new campaign to rally Islamic clerics to demand the death penalty for crimes against Islam, the Prophet Mohammed, or the Koran. Members of the group have already brought charges against two of Nasrin's books in private legal suits, on the grounds that they question Islamic law and incite women against men; the Sylhet court has agreed to hear these complaints.

Bangladesh is currently led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) under Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. Closely aligned with the BNP is a Muslim party, the Jamait-i-Islami, which holds twenty seats in Parliament. The Jamait-i-Islami is rumored to be linked with the CSI. In the words of one Bangladeshi writer, "Islamic extremists have a small base in Bangladesh. By capitulating to their demands in order to preserve her electoral coalition, Prime Minister Zia is giving them the space and credibility to become a real threat to human rights." This is also the opinion of Taslima Nasrin, who says in a recent fax:

> I am in grave danger. Making a death threat and offering a reward to execute it is a serious criminal offense in our country; surprisingly, this offense went unheeded by the government, who have done nothing to take action against it as required by law. The court ordered the police to protect me, but this order was not carried out; I was given no protection. The fundamentalists are moving ahead with their program, and the government of Bangladesh itself has become part of this barbarism; they are trying to find a pretext to ban all of my fifteen books. But I am determined to uphold my ideals.

In January 1993 Nasrin's passport was confiscated at the airport as she was en route to a conference in India, on the grounds that she had lied about her identity because she listed her occupation as a journalist, not a doctor. Though she is known primarily as a poet and journalist, Nasrin has a medical degree and at that time was employed by the Ministry of Health. She has since tried to quit her job to protest seizure of her passport, but the Ministry of Health has refused to accept her resignation. Nor has she been able to get another passport. Some groups are now calling on the government to prosecute her on charges of espionage for India.

Editorialists—and fundamentalists—in Bangladesh frequently compare Taslima Nasrin to Salman Rushdie. Beyond gender, there are important differences in the situation of these two writers. Rushdie lives in England, and despite his dreadful danger, he has been able to rely on the protection of England, while it took international protests to win even two police guards for Taslima Nasrin. Rushdie is also world famous, while Taslima Nasrin, like her persecutors, is little known outside her own region and language group. Many feel that only a sustained international campaign can put enough pressure on the government to counteract pressure from extremists within it.

International PEN calls for strong, sustained international pressure upon the Bangladeshi government to restore Nasrin's passport; lift the interdiction upon her novel *Lajja;* give her real, effective, and continuous police protection; and prosecute those who are trying to have her killed.

Update

The case of Taslima Nasrin is now internationally known. Salman Rushdie mentions her wherever he appears, she had an op-ed piece in the *New York Times,* and she is a major news story in India and Bangladesh. The 31 December 1993 issue of *Time* magazine had a page on her, and as a result it was banned in Bangladesh. All this international attention has saved Nasrin's life for the moment, though she can seldom leave her apartment and not alone.

The whole affair is a substantial embarrassment to the Begum Khaleda Zia government, which says that the matter has been blown out of proportion by people seeking "to malign the total freedom of expression enjoyed by all" in Bangladesh (press release, 26 October 1993). Nasrin's book *Lajja* remains banned, however, and the government has still not given back her passport.

Under pressure, the Council of Soldiers of Islam have retracted the price they put on her head, claiming it was all a misunderstanding—they had intended the money for her psychiatric care, since she must be crazy! In December 1993, however, fifty thousand Islamists marched on Parliament to ask the government to jail Nasrin and try her for blasphemy. The march was broken up by the police. The religious right is now calling for legislation making blasphemy a federal crime punishable by death.

The Women Writers' Committee of International PEN has invited Nasrin to speak in New York on 16 May 1994, and she has accepted. We would appreciate cooperation in helping to get her passport back so she can travel freely. Letters should be sent to Prime Minister Zia and the U. S. State Department. We are also interested in hearing of other instances of gender-related censorship; please write to the New York address given below.

Meredith Tax,
February 1994

APPEALS SHOULD GO TO:

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia
Office of the Prime Minister
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax: + 880-2-881-0115 (PM's residence)
+ 880-2-813-244 (PM's office)
+ 880-2-813-243 (PM's press secretary

President Abdur Rahman Biswas
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax + 880-2-813-243

COPIES TO:

International PEN Women Writers' Committee
532 W. 111th Street, #75
New York, NY 10025, USA
Fax + 1-212-932-0678

International PEN Writers in Prison Committee
FAX + 44-71-253-5711

LETTERS OF SOLIDARITY TO:

Taslima Nasrin,
Flat No. 1/904
Eastern Housing Apartment
8 and 9 Shantinagar
Dhaka 1217, Bangladesh

Excerpts from the *New York Times* Op-Ed, 30 November 1993

Sentenced to Death
by Taslima Nasrin

. . . . I will not be silenced. Everywhere I look I see women being mistreated, and their oppression justified in the name of religion. Is it not my moral responsibility to protest? Some men would keep women in chains—veiled, illiterate, and in the kitchen. There are sixty million women in my country; not more than 15 percent of them can read and write. How can Bangladesh become a modern country and find its place in the world when it is dragged backward by reactionary attitudes toward half its people?

It is my conviction that politics cannot be based on religion if our women are to be free. Bangladesh must become a modern secular state; family laws based on Islamic principles should be replaced by a uniform code ensuring the equal rights of women.

The country has laws against religious courts and their *fatwas* [Mulim edicts to have people killed for religious reasons]. But they are ignored. This year, in the village of Chatakchara, a young woman was stoned to death on orders from a local court because she had married again after a divorce. In Kalikapur village *mullahs* accused another young woman of fornication and sentenced her to a public flogging with 101 lashes of a broom. She died soon after, allegedly a suicide. There are other such cases, girls from poor families in isolated areas, illegally sentenced by extremist interpreters of Islamic law.

For speaking out against such crimes, I too have been condemned to death. Why does the government not prosecute the fanatics who institute these *fatwas?* Many believe it is because the administration has come to power with the help of the fundamentalists. . . .

Is our prime minister, Khaleda Zia, afraid to stand up to the fundamentalists? Does she not see that by placating them she allows them to grow stronger, and the time will come when they turn upon her too?

Bangladesh is my motherland. We gained our independence from Pakistan at the sacrifice of three million lives. That sacrifice will be betrayed if we allow ourselves to be dominated by religious extremism. Bangladesh should stand for women's equality and harmony between people of different faiths.

The *mullahs* who would murder me will kill everything progressive in Bangladesh if they are allowed to prevail. It is my duty to try to protect my beautiful country from them. I call on all those who share my values to help me defend my rights. By doing so, they will help save Bangladesh.

The Outlook: Journal of English Studies
ISSN: 2565-4748 (Print); ISSN: 2773-8124 (Online)
Published by Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus
Tribhuvan University, Pokhara, Nepal
[A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal; Indexed in NepJOL]
http://ejournals.pncampus.edu.np/ejournals/outlook/

THEORETICAL/CRITICAL ESSAY ARTICLE

Religion and Patriarchy in Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja*: An Intersectional Approach

Ganga Ram Paudyal
Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Pokhara, Nepal

Article History: *Submitted 25 May 2021; Reviewed 15 June 2021; Revised 05 July 2021*
Corresponding Author: *Ganga Ram Paudyal,* ***Email****: grampoudel@gmail.com*
DOI*: https://doi.org/10.3126/ojes.v12i1.38750*

Abstract
This paper explores Taslima Nasrin's novel Lajja from the perspective of intersectionality through the portrayal of female characters as religion and patriarchy have subjugated them in Bangladesh. Intersectionality crystalizes the dynamics of female issues regarding the tutelage that society and other institutions create for them. In the novel, the author tries to reflect these issues of intersectionalty regarding freedom of expression for both women and people in minorities and the problem of identity crises they suffer. Likewise, the religious as well as political conflicts impede the minorities group to feel liberate and find their identity. The reason behind this can be justified because the novel was banned and a fatwa was issued against Nasrin. Mainly, the focus is on how the religious and social confinements for the women and people from marginalized group made their voices unheard. This situation makes women rebel against male chauvinism and religious fanatics. As a qualitative review article, it reviews some articles relevant to Nasrin and her novel as secondary sources, her novel as primary source applying an intersectional approach, through the study of feminism and religious fanaticism as methodological tools.
Keywords: *Discrimination, fanaticism, intersectionality, patriarchy, subjugation*

Introduction

Lajja by Taslima Nasrin expounds the issue of multiple structures of subjugation of women either on the basis of gender or religion. It exposes that religion constructed by men uses the forms of various trapping to limit the boundary of female and minority groups. In this regard, this issue needs an exploration with a new perspective which is interactional. The characters in the novel have undergone multiple struggles, oppressions and suppressions caused by religious fanaticism and patriarchy. They are discriminated on the basis of manifold distinctions such as gender, race, religion and culture. It depicts the dilemma of a Hindu family in Dhaka after the demolition of the Babri Masjid as they are engulfed with terror and chaos of ethnic conflict. The Dutta family consists of four

Copyright 2021 © the Author(s) and the Publisher. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

members, Sudhamoy, his wife Kironmoyee, Suranjan and Maya their son and daughter. Kironmoyee and her daughter, Maya want to migrate from Bangladesh for safety from the very beginning, but male characters ignore their requests. It mainly deals with the problems of female characters and Hindu people who are marginalized, living under the domination of male characters and religion. As Kothaikani and Sathurappasamy say that the novel reflects the tortures faced by women both by religion and male superiority (100). Including the traumatic situation of women, people in minority are constantly suffering from the impending terror caused by religious conflict. One day Muslim extremists kidnap Maya and they cannot find her at any cost and perhaps they might have raped and killed her. Suranjan wants to take vengeance against Muslims and is determined to rape a Muslim girl. He brings a Muslim girl in his room for this and attacks her, but she is a prostitute who demands money and leaves without any reaction.

Lajja is a controversial novel of Nasrin which gained international recognition after its publication in 1993. Although it was written in seven days concerning the events of thirteen days, it established as a bestseller in both Bangladesh and India. The main focus of the novel is on the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in India by Hindu fanatics on December 1, 1992. It talks not only about male domination but also slaughter and rape of women as serious issues due to male chauvinism and religious anarchy. In this regard, it invites an intersectional approach to expose these issues. This resounds with the situation of black women as Crenshaw opines, "I want to suggest further that this single-axis framework erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group." (140). Even in the novel, single layer of analysis diminishes the bitter experience of women as they suffered in many ways and this approach helps to dig out their experiences. Hindu people in Bangladesh are oppressed and suppressed due to their different culture, religion, language or groups. Similarly, Hindu women are suffering from domestic violence and religious fanaticism. The main focus of the novel is to reflect different kinds of discriminations existed in Bangladesh. This way by presenting horrendous and horrifying experience of Hindus in Bangladesh, the novel revolves around the themes multiple layers of intersectionality. Similarly, Yadav talks about how the writer opposed mistreatment of women and became the target of Islam as, "The writer has rejected out the different religions including Islam since it suppressed the central privileges of women. Thus, her novel "*Lajja*" is an apropos example of women suppression through which she raised her voice of feminism" (382). Yadav is also talking about manifold dominations faced by women in the novel. Modern world is guided by scientific ideas, logic and rationality and it is shameful to see oppression, bloodshed, crimes, segregation, subjugation and uproar in the name of religion. By showing the problems faced by women in each society and mainly in Muslim culture and the use of religion for subjecting others, the novel urges the entire humanity to think critically about the existing cultural practices.

Review of Literature

Despite having many controversial statements about Nasrin and her writings, many critics have delivered their ideas about her works and ideas. She seems to have been supported more in international forum than in her country. In this issue, Zaman writes as, "Her book, *Lajja*, represented more geo-politics in the subcontinent than feminist views in Bangladesh. Nasrin did break the structural silence of her society on various women's issues, but her writings and her remarks went beyond what feminist/women's groups could support, and may have jeopardized their gains" (52).

Zaman focuses that Nasrin's work introduced the paradigmatic shift to view the women's issues. Still, she overlooks the very minute issues like patriarchy, freedom of expression and the issues of religious fanaticism or intersectionality in the novel. Therefore, it remains justifiable to explore those issues which Nasrin has embarked in the novel. Another writer Thakur connects the events of the novel with the demolition of Babri Masjid in India by Hindu fanatics and women have become the victim. As he includes that female characters in the novel have suffered a lot due to traditional gender roles and the focus of Nasrin is on the condition of the women belonging to minority group during a difficult phase (61). Thakur mainly focuses passivity of women, but not about male chauvinism and religious dogmatism. Patriarchal mindset is the real cause of rape, domestic violence and subjugation of women. Her focus on minority community cannot cover the multiple structures of domination prevailing both in Hindu and Muslim communities.

The novel *Lajja*, talks about the dominant motif of religious anarchy and problem of existence of minority groups in communalism. As Rao clarifies, "Nasrin strives to show how communal violence has been generated by the lunatic fringe in all communities, how innocent persons are duped into serving the ulterior purpose of communalists, how extremist elements in the communities infuse tension and hatred for their own ends at the cost of inter-communal harmony" (93). Rao focuses more on social issue and in which there is always domination of powerful and majority groups upon inferior groups. This studies focuses on what causes women inferior and how religion becomes anarchic and forces people to become atheist. Showing the dreadful and horrifying experience of a minority family, the trials and abuse faced by Hindu communities in Bangladesh after the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and its aftermath Pathan and Jasrai opine*, "Lajja-Shame*– the most controversial novel by Taslima Nasrin is a bold attempt to redefine religion and humanism in the most dreadful manner. The spectre of communalism haunts the Duttas -Sudhamoy and Kironmoyee – the couple and their son, Suranjan and daughter, Maya" (62). Pathan and Jasrai focus more on religion and humanism but not the cause of how it converts into fanaticism and secular humanism. By showing male domination upon female and major religious groups upon minority groups, many issues can be focused. Next, Banashankari talks about the success of the novel which made her famous all over the world and it changed her life and career drastically. He writes as, "Her masterpiece *Lajja* (called *Shame* in English) was a breakthrough in 1993. The novel dealt with a controversial/ religious theme. It depicts the struggle of a patriotic Bangladeshi Hindu family in a Muslim environment" (44). Banashankari's emphasis is on religion and social problem including the domination of Muslims upon Hindus in Bangladesh but not on how patriarchal domination played role to make women victim of many attacks. By showing the evils of male domination, racial injustice, cultural differences and religious anarchy in the novel, the paper focuses on the direction of intersectionality for reflecting various types of discriminations functioning in societies.

Statement of Problem

Nasrin projects the theme of male supremacy in which female characters are passive, nurturing and the tools of taking vengeance for fulfilling interests of men. In such circumstances, religion proves to be a framework to dominate the people in minority in which their voice remains unnoticed. Next, religion is made by men and it promotes male values and women are polarized in many ways. Therefore, their problems need to be analyzed from a broader perspective. Religion instead of disseminating the values of humanity and hopes including all kinds of people has become a tool of

domination. The women and Hindu people in the novel have undergone manifold dominations and single perspective cannot reveal the problems of different kinds of people. The novel urges people for the change in status quo regarding women's position and religious anarchy. Thus, this paper answers the following research questions:
a) What is intersectionality?
b) How are women and Hindu people discriminated in *Lajja*?
c) Why are women and minority groups have the same plight in all societies?

Objectives

The present study intends to show the position of female characters and people in minority as reflected in the novel *Lajja.* It also aims to show the dominance of these issues in the society analyzing from manifold perspectives.

Methodology

This paper applies explanatory and interpretative method to address the research questions. As a primary source, the novel provides the information of female domination. Similarly, it reflects how religion has become fanatics. Different books and articles written by different writers and critics about intersectionality, feminism, mistreatment of women and the techniques applied for bringing changes have been compared, explored, interpreted and expounded to analysis the novel from intersectional perspective. Similarly, articles written about religion, criticizing its weakness in terms of the domination of women and the people in minority have been also used as methodological texts. The issue focuses in them concerning how religion has become fanatics creating people to turn to atheist, secular and humanist being misogynist and intolerable. This article adopts a thematic analysis method to revisit these great works. In the same way, this article also reveals how the themes from these works match in the novel. Related secondary sources such as reviews and articles written about Nasrin and the novel have been considered as secondary sources to analyze the fact of patriarchy and religious dogma.

Intersectionality and Fanaticism

Intersectionality concerns with the discrimination existed in any society on the basis of sex, gender, identity, caste, class, origin, economic condition, ability, and many other forms. It is related with the issues of creating blockade to equal access of opportunities. It widens our understanding about divergent and complex ways of power exercise rather than focusing on simple binaries of oppression providing critical ideas how multiple identities overlap and intersect with them. Its main focus is to include different kinds of injustices together for preventing violence of many kinds women face. Kimberlé Crenshaw first propounded the concept of intersectionality in 1989 to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics intersect with one another and overlap in process of female marginalization. In this regard, Carbado et al mention that she introduced the term to reflect the discriminations faced by black women who became victim in many ways on the basis of colour, cast, gender, and age. (303). She coined the term to address the distinct problems of black women that time. Women experience many kinds of discriminations and by highlighting only gender distinction others fall in shadow. Some examples are of race, colour, age, disability, queer, migrant or refugee, heterosexuality and many more and intersectional approach help to show all kinds discrimination for the liberation of women.

In 1991 Crenshaw Crenshaw again employed intersectionality to highlight the ways in which social movement organization and advocacy around violence against

women. Carbado et al further opine that she has shown the vulnerabilities of women of color, particularly those from immigrant and socially disadvantaged communities who are always at margin and are surrounded by dominations (304). This way, she uses it to address multiple discriminations of women from different perspectives because they interact and overlap. With identity many complex structures are embedded and women of different parts undergo different obstacles and a single perspective cannot include the problems of all women. For example, the black women suffer not only being female but also being of different colour, migrant groups, and in many other ways. Weldon opines, "the concept originates in efforts of Black feminists in the United States to theorize about their experiences and social position,… confronts an important dimension of social complexity: the interaction between social structures such as race, class, and gender"(193). To address the complex experiences of black women, the concept was coined and it is applicable to analyze the problems of women in other communities. Applying the concept of intersectionality is important for critically evaluating social relations and dominations through multiple ways of understanding which functions between systems of oppression. It comes out of the notion that political life is shaped by race and gender as the problems of different women differ in many ways. Weldon further mentions, "Black women face many problems *as black women*, and their unique perspectives, identities, and experiences, cannot be derived from examination of the experiences and position of either black men or white women" (194). The problems of black and white women are different and from the experience of one the problems of other cannot be described and it is significant to apply intersectionality.

Fanaticism can be found in all religions either it is Hindu or Muslim or Christianity or Buddhism. Some cultures take change as sin and some others want to resist change due to fear of losing their position. Even in advanced country like America there existed it as Engineer opines, "The concept of 'fundamentalism' is in fact the product of modern American society. Some Christians believed during the 1930s in the literal truth of the Bible, and they were described as 'fundamentalists'. It is this borrowed western concept which is being applied to some religious movements in Asia" (703). Some religions are moderate and tolerant than others on the basis of their practices. Mainly at the time of radical, social and political upheavals problems like firmness, jealousy and fanaticism appear. Sometimes the firmness becomes good but they become risky when they are left uncontrolled. When people become totally blind in matter of social change and oppose introducing new ideas or emerging reality show fanaticism. In politics it may be simple but in the process of radical change and social disorders the blind faith can push the society in the grip of fanatics. Similarly, in the case of religion too, we find the same situation. When religious people resist change and want to maintain status quo same situation happens.

Subjugation in *Lajja*

The novel portrays the discrimination of female characters and shows how the religion has become the laws and created division between people in majority and minority. It mainly deals with the theme of slaughter of men towards women by the projection of inferior condition of women. It depicts how supremacy of male has challenged self-respect of women segregating them in many ways. Regarding the status of women, the novel shows the pathetic situation of Hindu women in Bangladesh after the demolition of Babri Masjid. The Dutta family which belongs to Hindu minority in Bangladesh consisting four members becomes the victim of the incident. Females are horrified by the growing unrest but males are unaware. Due to male supremacy in the family, their daughter became the victim. She was abducted by Muslims and perhaps she

was raped and killed. As Datta writes, "The plot narrates the victimisation of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh, focusing on the persecuted family of Suranjan Dutta, which is finally compelled to migrate to India" (48). In the novel, Kironmoyee, the mother and their daughter, Maya want to leave Bangladesh immediately after demolition of the masjid but Sudhamoy, the father and their son, Suranjan do not want and make them live there. As Nasrin writes in the novel, "Suranjan knew that Maya wanted him to look for a place where they could go for temporary hiding from the danger that threatened them" (1). They had already faced such challenges and had hidden in the house of a Muslim friend, Kamal. Only after losing Maya, they move to India which is a matter of same for males.

The novel, *Lajja* begins with the expression of fear of females which is clearly reflected by frequent remark of Maya urging her brother to do something before getting late as, "Dada, aren't you going to wake up and do something before it is too late" (1)? If the male had taken decision on the right time analyzing the situation, Maya would have been saved. Here the domination of male is clearly reflected. Next, Maya became the victim of religious fanaticism. In the name of taking revenge innocent women become victim. Similarly, towards the end of the novel, Suranjan rapes a Muslim girl, Shamima in the name of revenge, but the girl is a prostitute. She reports the scene, "As Suranjan attacked her naked body, the girl moaned with pain, screaming occasionally, 'O my God! I am dying of pain….' Suranjan laughed with savage satisfaction. He continued to hurt her till he could do no more and then he raped her" (201). This is also subjugation of women. The two girls Maya and Shamima do not have any connection of the conflict between Hindus and Muslims and demolition of masjids and temples but they have to face two sides of domination. At the same time, male characters do not face such torture as female face. It clearly depicts the two sides of oppression women have faced in Bangladesh. They have to follow the order of males at home and outside they become the victim of kidnap, rape and even murder.

The novel reflects that the Hindu women become the victim of not only patriarchal domination but also racial conflict that takes place between Hindus and Muslims. In this regard, Kothaikani and Sathurappasamy clarify as "The double marginalization of women on religious grounds on the one hand and their gender identity on the other is an additional crucial aspect of this novel" (100). The issue of gender identity is mostly seen in many societies how far they are advanced or conservative. The level of domination varies on the basis of how educated women are. Even on the basis of religion also women are marginalized in all cultures either it is Hindu or Muslim or Christian to name a few. All of them formulate tutelages. Nasrin opposes all religions supporting people in minority either of any caste, culture, gender or religion. In a speech concerning male domination in all religions, she says, "I criticize Islam also I criticize Christianity, Judaism. I criticize Hinduism because women are oppressed by all religions. All religions are anti-women. Religions are made by men. And men made religion for their own fun, for their own interest ("itvindia," 00:03:46 -00:04.09)." In this sense, it is clear that women are dominated in all religions, but the level of domination is different in many countries. Some are more rigid and some are a bit more democratic.

In the novel the Hindu family constantly has the feeling of isolation, terror and threats as their daughter was kidnapped when she was six. They also receive many anonymous letters threatening to kidnap her for ransom. Demanding security, "Sudhamoy had gone to the police. The men on duty at the police station had made a routine record of the complaint and had taken no further action" (15). Many incidents have suffered them and they can do nothing. They also realize it futile to complain. The novel has exposed the rise of religious extremism including with the existing patriarchal

system in terms of subjugation. This resonates with the idea of Crenshaw with reference to the situation of black women who are victimized by two types of male violence either being raped or battered and their experiences are not included in the discourses of feminism and antiracism. In this connection, she writes, "Because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of colour within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of colour are marginalized within both" (1244). Similarly, Hindu women in Bangladesh have multiple identities and are also discriminated by both male domination and culture. The social norms, cultural values, rituals and traditions have been oppressive due to the promotion of male supremacy and religious fanaticism.

The novel reflects the loyalty, passivity and nurturing behavior of women in many ways which are in fact the cause of their suffering. Kironmoyee is ready to face any kind of difficulties to make her family happy but her husband is so indifferent. He expects everything from his wife and uses his wife as a means of fulfilling his desires. She always remains submissive and her desire to move to India is unheard. She has no alternative except following the decision of the males unwillingly. In the novel, she is ready to sell her ornaments for the happiness of her family as, "Her latest sacrifice had involved selling a pair of her gold bangles to Dr. Haripada's wife. She had not of course discussed the matter with anyone in the family. After all, gold was not so precious that it could not be sold if the need arose" (113). Mainly, the female characters do not have their identity and they are compelled to shed tears secretly due to dominating behaviour of males. Sudhamoy and Suranjan are free, but mother and daughter are not free in term of decision making process, identity and confidence level. This resounds with the idea of Tyson when he says that the promotion of culturally constructed traditional gender roles privilege men and women are oppressed reflecting them as inferior, submissive, nurturing and emotional whereas males are referred as strong, decisive, strong and rational (81). This way, the decision of female characters is not valued and males are reflected as decisive in the novel. Males influence the society and extend their act of domination due to their decision making power leaving women behind.

The Bangladeshi society is shifting from secularism to fundamentalism which is seen by the incidents of the novel. Nasrin opines, "The state of Bangladesh was founded on the basis of four major principles: nationalism, secularism, democracy and socialism" (42). After independence there is manipulation and constitution is changed to exercise power. She advocates for the need of secularism, atheism and freedom of expression to tackle with the challenges. The unity among people has been weakened due to loss of cultural diversity and promotion of self-centred ideology. She says, "Religion was used as a political weapon and a large number of people were forced to follow the dictates of Islam. Thus, unlawfully and unconstitutionally, Islam became the national religion of Bangladesh. As a result, communalism and religious fanaticism exploded out of control" (43). Many incidents like capture, kidnap, torture of Hindu women, attack over Hindu sages, capture of property, destruction of houses and temples have engulfed. Many inhuman activities done against Hindu people in many villages have frightened the Dutta family. Increase in such incidents shows the impact of communalism and fundamentalism. Then the people in minority and women become the victim in Bangladesh and are constantly living under the domination of those powerful groups.

Revelation of Intersectionality in *Lajja*

Lajja shows the brutal behavior and torture of Muslims under the Hindu family, minority groups and women. Kironmoyee and Maya become the victim of double oppression one of domestic violence and of Muslim fanatics. Being a Hindu married woman, Kironmoyee has to hide her cultural practices due to fear of Muslims. In this

regard, the novel says, "Kironmoyee had stopped using sindur in the parting in her hair and loha and sankha on her wrist as was expected of every married Hindu woman" (97). This shows the life of women in Muslim community is conditioned that they are always worried about impending attack of being at margin. Showing the subjugation of women in the novel by both groups of fanatics, Mookerjea-Leonard writes, "Suranjan on the one hand, and Maya's captors on the other — although with different religious affiliations and social locations, subscribe to a mutually comprehensible semiotic system of patriarchal violence. Women's bodies, like those of minority men, constitute the material on which the discourses of nation, community, and sexuality intersect and get played out" (43). Males in any culture or in any context try to dominate women and then they become the victim of any kind. Minority men even being themselves the victims of religion dominate women because women's bodies have become the platforms for all to practice their role of dominance. This way, it portrays two kinds of domination and the main target is women.

Female characters in the novel act in many ways for the happiness of their family though they are dominated by both their family and society. For example, Kironmoyee becomes so submissive upon the demand of the community as well as her family. This is quite similar with the idea of Simone de Beauvoir, "Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but in relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being … she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute- she is the Other" (cited in Habib 683). The behaviors of the male characters in the novel show that they never co-operate women and behaved them as indecisive, dependent and the other. From the very beginning both mother and daughter are worried about the possible attack that might befall, but father and son remain indifferent. The pain felt by Kironmoyee is difficult to relieve. Due to fear, she behaves abnormally as, "Suddenly, in the middle of the night, she would wake up crying. Why she cried, or for whom she cried, were secrets she would not divulge. The tears would eventually dry up and she would silently carry on with the household chores- cooking, cleaning, seeing to her husband's ablutions" (97). This way, women are full of agony living during the time of turmoil. The situation of the Muslim women is more miserable than the Hindu women as they are treated more unfairly as other, inferior and dependent. Similarly, Hindu women are discriminated on the basis of religion in Bangladesh.

Hindu people cannot observe their ritual practices in Bangladesh as openly as Muslims do. Many Hindu girls are abducted, tortured, raped and even killed by Muslims but nobody is arrested and punished. The practice of domination and discrimination of Muslims began long ago and it became intense after the demolition of the masjid. In this regard, Nasrin writes as, "It was no secret that the victimization of the Hindus had begun long before the riots in 1990 and the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992" (56). The novel is full of the incidents of related to destruction of temples and tortures against Hindus. There are some examples of such cases in the novel even a teacher is reported to have been involved in abduction and rape of his student with others but no one is arrested. Maya was also kidnapped when she was six. All the incidents show that the laws based on religion cannot maintain peace and reformation is needed in such practices. In fact, the novel is an indication of confrontation which raised voice against traumatic situation caused by male supremacy and Islamic fanatics.

In Nasrin's *Lajja* many examples of religious fanaticism can be traced because it shows how women and people in minority have become the victim due to their Hindu identity. Begum says, "*Lajja* by Taslima Nasrin tackles the universal issue of fanaticism and fundamentalism. The issue does, in fact, necessitate immediate attention" (283). The

issue portrayed in it is applicable all over the world and appeals our urgent attention and actions. Women and minority people have become the victim of such faith so far today in every society. The novel shows the expression of the fear of Hindus as, "I know that you don't pray, and that you eat beef as well. Why don't you tell them you are not a pure Hindu, that you are half Muslim?" (111). The Hindus have partly accommodated with Muslims, but are still terrified by Muslim fundamentalists. Sometimes, even people in power are marginalized. This resonates with the concept of Weldon that intersectionality applies to various groups in society who are advantaged or disadvantaged that in complex social relations person privileged in some ways is disadvantaged in others not being equal (195). This way, the discriminations of all people either Hindus or Muslims or males or females upper class or lower class can be reflected. Intersectional approach helps to reveal various forms of dominations existed in societies. Then the problems of all either of Muslim women or of Hindu women, minor groups or many others are reflected from this perspective.

Unlike Christian and Islam, Hindu people are regarded as more tolerant but could escape from being fanatics. Engineer writes, "It produced fanatics who considered it their religious duty to demolish Babri masjid. Their tolerance was at its lowest and their behaviour totally irrational. In fact their fanaticism brought great shame to India" (703). Similarly, showing the novel as a criticism of both fanaticism and fundamentalism, S. P. Swain says, "*Lajja* is a moving story of protest, passion, principle and persecution. It is the story of humanity's struggle to assert its innate and inherent rights in a society torn asunder by the forces of religious fundamentalism and blind fanaticism" (cited in Begum 284). Even in the preface of the novel, Nasrin has said that she dislikes communalism and fundamentalism which has grown in Bangladesh after the case of Babri Masjid and it is shameful for all to happen such terrible thing in their beautiful country being the document their collective defeat (ix). By this, she urges all the people of the world for the reformation of their cultural, social, political and ritual practices with the rapidly changing modern world. Similarly, multiple perspectives help to examine the problems of people of various facets who are discriminated and marginalized in many ways.

Conclusion

Nasrin's *Lajja* was written in seven days concerning the events of thirteen days showing the pathetic condition of women and minority people in Bangladesh after the demolition of Babri Masjid. Analyzing the novel from the perspective of intersectionality to find many kinds of dominations made against women and people in minority, there is revelation of many kinds of discriminations. There are restrictions of many kinds constructed by culture to subjugate power. They have been suffering from identity crisis living in such dominated state and sometimes they have to hide their identity. Female characters in the novel are dominated in many ways either inside their homes, outside their homes by male characters and also by religious fanatics who abduct, rape and murder women but the society remains silent. Kironmoyee, Maya and Shamima have undergone sufferings of any kind caused either by male or by religion, politics, culture, rituals or tradition. Intersectional approach helped to reflect the various difficulties of the characters and a single perspective cannot cover all the problems. The women and the people in minority are always compelled to live in terror and their life is full of chaos while living in minority. It is also noted that communalism is dangerous for minor groups for their existence. Next, religion has provided ground for people to be fanatics and then they begin to dominate minority people, kidnap, torture, and kill women. The intersectional approach helped to show how people of many facets have been

discriminated or marginalized as no one is equal. Female characters in the novel have become not only the victim of patriarchy but also of religion. Further research can be made about the need of reforming religious practices for preserving minority people in communalism.

Works Cited

Banashankari, Mr. L B. "Taslima Nasrin's Life and Works." *Literary Endeavour*, vol.6, no. 4, 2015, pp.42-45.

Begum, Shameemunnisa. "Iqbalunnisa Hussain's Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household: A Study." *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, vol. 7, no. 5, 2021, pp. 281-285.

"CNN IBN Taslima Nasrin 22 4 200." *YouTube*, uploaded by itvindia, 17 May 2012, https://youtu.be/38VjtdgpWLM

Carbado, Devon W et al. "Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2013, pp. 303-312.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1, no. 8, 1989, pp. 139-167.

---. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stan. L. Rev.*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, pp. 1241-1299.

Datta, Sangeeta. "The Politics of Space: Taslima Nasreen and Her Works." *Wasafiri*, vol. 12, no. 24, 1996, pp. 46-50.

Engineer, Asghar Ali. "Religious Fanaticism and Communalism." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 32, no. 14, 1997, pp. 701-704.

Habib, M.A.R. *A History of Literary Criticism and Theory from Plato to the Present.* Blackwell, 2008.

Kothaikani, R and G Sathurappasamy. "Portrayal of Women in Taslima Nasreen's Lajja." *Language in India*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2019, pp.100-104.

Mookerjea-Leonard, Debali. "Masculinity in Crisis: Nasreen's Lajja and the Minority Man in Postcolonial South Asia." *Social Text*, vol. 29, no. 3(108), 2011, pp. 31-49.

Nasrin, Taslima. *Lajja (Shame)*. Penguin Books, 1993.

Pathan, Nishrin and Ms Vibha Jasrai. "Revered Blithe and Joyful Recollection of Communal Harmony in Taslima Nasrin's Lajja." *Research Scholar*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2016, pp. 61-66.

Rao, V. Pala Prasad. "Syncretic Culture in Nasreen's Lajja and Tharror's Riot", *The Indian Journal of English Studies*, vol. xlvi, 2009, pp. 92-100.

Thakur, Shikha. "Feminist Analysis of Taslima Nasrin's Lajja." *Spring Magazine of English Literature*, 2016.

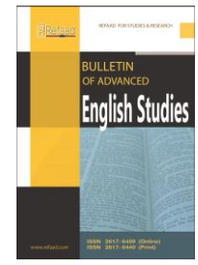
Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. Routledge, 2014.

Weldon, S. Laurel. "Intersectionality." *Politics, Gender and Concepts: Theory and Methodology, ed. Gary Goertz and Amy G. Mazur*, 2008, pp. 193-218.

Zaman, Habiba. "The Taslima Nasrin Controversy and Feminism in Bangladesh: A Geo-Political and Transnational Perspective." *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1999, pp. 42-54.

Yadav, Miss Ashu. "Feminism in Taslima Nasrin's Work "Lajja"." *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 8, 2017, pp. 379-393.

Bulletin of Advanced English Studies – Vol. 2, No. 2 , 2019, pp. 55–65
e-ISSN 2617-6459, p-ISSN 2617-6440
Available online at http:// www.refaad.com
https://doi.org/10.31559/baes2019.2.2.1



Exploring the Socio-Religious Feminist Struggle of South Asian Third-World Women Against the Labyrinthine Gossamer of Patriarchy in Selected Bangladeshi Fiction

Hassan Bin Zubair

PhD Scholar (English Literature)- Department of English-National University of Modern Languages- Pakistan
hbz77@yahoo.com

Abstract: This research explores the oppression of patriarchy on women in Muslim orthodox community in the light of Feminist Theory. The research draws on the basic assumption of feminism and shows the relationship between the religion and patriarchy. It shows how the relationship helps in the oppression of the females in the society. This research is qualitative in nature. On the surface level, the novel *Wild Wind* seems to be the documentation of the major characters of everyday life. However, a deeper analysis, while citing the non-western feminist critics like Margot Badran and her book *Feminism in Islam* and Anitta Kynsilehto and her book *Islamic Feminism: Current Perspective* and their position on feminism, this research asserts that the patriarchy in Muslim society is deeper than it seems. And Taslima Nasreen's account of her youthful life unveils the patriarchal codes and myths to subjugate the woman. On the surface, this book reveals Taslima's tumultuous youth in a patriarchal family and social structure. The book seems to recount the youthful experience of a rebellious girl; her experience of adult life and the minute detailing of a family relationship. But a deeper analysis shows not only patriarchy but also religion functions as an apparatus of repression for the women. Hence, the present research attempts at finding how patriarchy and Muslim religion are in complicit relation; how religion and patriarchy are making each other powerful making it more difficult for the women of Islamic society.

Keywords: *Women, Feminism, Patriarchy, Oppression, Society, Religion.*

1. Introduction

Taslima's novel *Wild Wind* is one of the most famous literary texts and a controversial novel too. Since, the publication of the novel, it has received numerous copious appreciation and criticism from different forum of critical scholarship. Different critiques viewed their opinions differently; however, this research attempts to focus on the patriarchal domination and exploitation of the characters in the novel and its impact on the individual and the society. Taslima Nasreen controversial because she not only criticizes the Islam religion but also narrates private life of the people. Shirshendu Mukhopadhya says that Nasreen has written this book only for her own benefit that is to earn money. According to him, she has business aspect in her mind. He comments:

> *"Taslima used her pen recklessly and hurt the sentiments of the common people. Also, Nasreen is an atheist. She was born in a Muslim family, but she became an atheist. Autobiographical books of Taslima raised controversy not only because of her criticism of Islam but also for narratives involving the private lives of the common people. Taslima candidly described her sexual relationship. She received criticism by progressive writers and intellectuals who described Wild Wind as a book written with the business aspect in the mind." (Mukhopadhya, 2004, p.34)*

This view emphasizes Taslima Nasreen as the controversial writer. She was said to have inflicted insult on society and she could not stay in the city. Voll Kamth comments:

> *"Nasreen's autobiographical writings have also proved to be provocative and have faced governmental sanctions in India as well as Bangladesh. She is accused of writing heinous and false facts about the most revered figure of Islam, Muhammad. She is criticized as an attention-seeker who is compulsively provocative and over-simplistic in her formulations on Islam and women. We condemned her for seeking trouble in India." (Kamth, 1998, p.16)*

The view merely experiences the religious matter. The novel *Wild Wind* is considered as an anti-religious document. For these critics, Nasreen's writings are seeking trouble in her country and her religion. Critically examining the autobiographical book *Wild Wind*, next critic Mir Zohir Hussain claims:

> *"This is an insult to Muslims. She is an insult to Islam because she smokes and wears clothes that Islam does not approve of. Her writings carry the feelings of anti-religion, which will break the belief of Muslims towards Muhammad." (Hussain, 2000, p.18)*

Meer Nurul Islam is sympathetic towards Nasreen. According to him if we are angry towards bad norms and rules, we may raise tools. The tools such as axe, hammer and chisel to fight against such things but Nasreen has used her pain against such exploitations and, dominations. He argues:

> *"Within the bounds of our closed society, darkness reigns so strongly, that there is no fissure to let in light or air. If one cannot make a chink through a needle or nail on that wall of darkness, one can only use a spade, or an axe, or a hammer and a chisel bore holes for light. Taslima has used her pen to bring change in the society, which is appropriate." (Islam, 1991, p.7)*

It is evident from the review of the criticism available on the novel that none of the critics has thrown light in the novel from the perspective of feminist theory. That is why; feminist theory is a newer perspective to look at the text that helps to excavate the sufferings and exploitations of the characters. Feminism conjures up various images and ideas regarding the women's issues. In spite of diversity, feminism often represented as a single entity and somehow concerned with gender equality and freedom. Lois Tyson defines patriarchy as:

> *"Patriarchy is thus, by definition sexist, which means it protects the belief that women are innately inferior to men. This belief in the inborn inferiority of woman is a form of what is called biological essentialism, because it is based on biological differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging essence as men and women. A striking illustration is the word hysteria, which derives from the Greek word for womb and refers to psychological disorders deemed peculiar to women and characterized by overemotional, extremely irrational behavior." (Tyson, 2006, p.86)*

This book *Wild Wind* deals with the issue of religion, gender inequality, the condition of a unemployed person in a society or even in his or her own house and many more perfectly. So, this book is not only an autobiography but also a document of a Muslim Orthodox society. The condition of Taslima and her mother and sister and all the female characters in her house is perfect example of gender inequality. This study makes significant contribution, mainly in the three areas of concern. First, this study brings in focus the relationship between patriarchy and religion especially in relation to Islam religion. For this, the researcher cites the examples of the holy Quran and analyzes in the light of new understanding womanhood and sexuality. Second, this research studies how patriarchy functions institutionally right from the family, with a case study of Taslima Nasreen and her family. Lastly, the study analyzes the testimony of a woman and highlights her space in an orthodox society. The patriarchal structure of the society and its outlook is reinforced by the religion. Most of the major religions have justified the subordinating position of the women. Male domination in the institutionalization and doctrine formation of the religion prove that they have made it in their favors.

It has been institutionalized so strongly that any form of rebel from the side of women is crushed. The *Wild Wind*, when published in Bangladesh for the first time, angered the patriarchal and religious authority. The religious leaders blamed it for breaking the code of the Almighty by writing 'obscene' youth experience and questioning god's authority. It sees in the light of Muslim Feminist Margot Badran and western feminist Simon De Beauvoir's idea how the gender is construct to subjugate women and analyzes the role of Taslima along with other female character in her autobiography. Although this study makes significant use of the concepts developed in Muslim Feminist theory, it does not offer a comprehensive analysis of feminist theories. Rather the concepts developed by Margot Badran and Anitta Kynsilehto remain the primary tool of this analysis. Since the major objective of the study is to study the exploitation and the oppression of the major characters in the novel *Wild Wind*, the other issues remain outside the scope of this project. Given the nature of research, available time, and resources, this study does not offer any analysis of feminist theory in its holistic approach although such an analysis would definitely contribute towards unearthing the female conditions and pangs of sufferings.

2. Research Objectives

- To show the steps taken by Nasreen against her traditional culture, and her totalitarian family systems.
- To analyze the repression of women in Muslim Orthodox Community. It also reveals the position of women in Islam.
- To reveal the experience of women in its crude form which otherwise could have been fabricated in other literary genres.
- To show, how gender is constructed culturally from the childhood.

3. Research Questions

- What are the inherent causes of oppression and domination to the females in the society?
- How Muslim women are exploited and dominated in Muslim community, presented in *Wild Wind*?

4. Theoretical Framework

As this study reveals the oppression of women in Muslim society through Nasreen's *Wild Wind*, in terms of feminist theory, it follows the theory of Islamic Feminists like Margot Badran and Anitta Kynsilehto. Margot Badran's *Feminism in Islam* and Anitta Kynsilehto's *Islamic Feminism: Current Perspective* are the theoretical tools for the elaboration of this research. The fundamental goal of this study is to reveal the suppression and oppression of women in Muslim society. Therefore, my project tries to invent the sufferings and exploitation of the major characters in the novel. A critical lens of Muslim Feminist theory places the spotlight on the important ways in which the research reveals the pathetic condition of women in different society especially the Muslim society. This research also reveals the relationship of Muslim religion and feminism.

Islamic Feminism

Merlene LeGates in her book *Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society* finds it problematic to fix a particular date to the women's voice against patriarchal repression.

> *"As historians have long recognized, neither women's consciousness of their own oppression nor the determination of individual and groups to combat it was dependent on the birth of modern terminology. This consciousness is what I have looked for in early feminism." (LeGates, 2001, p.15)*

However, what we generally understand is that the history of feminism is the history of feminist movement as well as its origin. Islamic Feminism that originated from 1980s and 1990s mainly focuses on the pangs and sufferings of the Muslim women whether they be in West or non-west. The main purpose of Muslim feminism or Islamic Feminism is dismantling the gender inequalities prevalent in the society. Islamic Feminism has played major role in raising voice against the major social evils prevalent in the society. Ziba Mir-Hosseiniin her essay "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism" says:

> *"Many Muslim women and their life choices whether they live in an Islamic state or as part of a diaspora in a Western liberal state are governed and shaped by a set of patriarchal beliefs. Only the elite and the minority of highly educated women have the luxury of choice, of rejecting or challenging these beliefs and laws. A movement to sever patriarchy from Islamic ideals and sacred texts and to give voice to an ethical and egalitarian vision of Islam can and does empower Muslim women from all walks of life to make dignified choices. This, in the end, is what Islamic feminism is about." (Mir-Hosseini, 2008, p.645)*

In this way, she talks about the Islamic Feminism and tries to define Islamic feminism in a new way. It was first introduced in Iran by writers like Mir Hosseini and Najmabadi. The term was used to describe a new feminist paradigm. Margot Badran writes:

> *"Islamic Feminism argues that woman may be heads of state, leaders, or judges. Islamic Feminism stands to benefit us all, Muslims of both sexes, as well as non-Muslims living side by side with Muslims everywhere." (Badran, 2008)*

In her book *Feminism in Islam*, Badran further analyzes and explains about Islamic Feminism. Islamic feminism helps to that woman who is caught in between the patriarchal norms and values. Islamic feminism helps woman understand their gender discrimination and the exploitation within the family. Souad Eddouada in her essay "Implementing Islamic Feminism" argues:

> *"With the growth of global religious fundamentalisms, rethinking religion has become a necessary path for feminist criticism within Muslim majority and minority Muslim countries. The achievement of a critique of religion from within, independently from the fundamentalist thought, is no longer a paradox, but a nowadays possibility. Accordingly, the deployment of social sciences tools of analysis is allowing Muslim feminists to build up multiple dialogic connections between Islam and feminism and disclaim both the orientalist and fundamentalist thesis of antagonism between an essential notion of Western feminism and a timeless Islamic patriarchy." (Eddouada, 2008, p.37)*

In *Women and Sexuality*, Geetha Satpathy says, "Sex is considered a fact- one is born with either male or female genitalia. Gender is considered a social construction - it grants meaning to the fact of sex. Conversely, it could be said that only after specific meanings came to be attached to the sexes, did sex differences become pertinent" (Satpathy, 2000, p.45).

Patriarchal Grounds

Lois Tyson defines patriarchy as:

> *"Patriarchy is thus, by definition sexist, which means it protects the belief that women are innately inferior to men. This belief in the inborn inferiority of woman is a form of what is called biological essentialism, because it is based on biological differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging essence as men and women. A striking illustration is the word hysteria, which derives from the*

Greek word for womb and refers to psychological disorders deemed peculiar to women and characterized by overemotional, extremely irrational behavior."(Tyson, 2006, p.86)

Patriarchy fosters the gender-based inequalities that decide man as superior and woman as inferior, man as powerful and the woman as powerless. One of the American feminist Kate Millet sees, "Patriarchy as grotesque, increasingly militaristic, increasingly greedy, colonialist, imperialistic, and brutal, with a terrible disregard of civil liberties, of democratic forms" (Millet, 1970, p.511). Mary W. Wood in her book *The History of Feminism* defines patriarchy as:

"Patriarchy is a social system, in which the father or eldest male is the head of the household, having authority over women and children. Patriarchy also refers to a system of government by male and to a system of government by male and to the dominance of men in a social or cultural system. It may also include title being treated through the male line." (Wood, 2001, p.12)

Lydia Falcon, a feminist critic in her article, "Feminism against Fundamentalism" says, "Patriarchy refers to the structure of society that is based upon the father ruled. Patriarchy is considered oppressive when it subordinates women at various levels by promoting masculine values and structures to maintain male privilege" (Falcon, 2001, p.4).

Analysis

The feminist reading of *Wild Wind* puts an eagle eye on the social evils and cultural dissimilarities in terms of freedom, education, job, and so many other things. It also describes Nasreen's revolt against her family, society, and men who have become obstacles in her natural and instinctual desire and dream fulfillment. Above all, it is a woman's search of love, freedom, identity, and independence, which is not given to her because she is a woman. That is why Nasreen goes against the norms and values of the society and religion. The novel deals with the problem of women in general and Nasreen herself in particular. Since, her child age she has been facing many problems. A sense of inequality, domination and hatred to the woman by the male dominated society makes her cross the boundaries made for woman. She is not allowed to do the works according to her wishes; she finds many partialities between son and daughter not only by other people even by her father too. Her father has discriminatory attitude towards his daughters. When she wants to celebrate her birthday, it is very difficult to know her exact birth date. Her mother could not remember and father has kept record of his sons' date only but not hers and her sister's. She searches everywhere in the house. She writes:

"There were two birthdates, Dada's and Chhotada's, written on the first page of father's book. There was no trace of Yasmin's (sister) and my birth dates or years in any corner of any one of the twelve hundred pages of the book. In fact, they would not be found in any scrap of paper in the house." (Nasreen, 2006, p.2)

Taslima Nasreen's *Wild Wind* recounts her tumultuous youth in an orthodox Muslim society and a traditional family. The book documents her life from her early teen to the middle of her youth. She has very sharply observed the world around her and documented it very vividly. Family is the closest world she has; and its member are the characters she comes into regular contact. In the text *Wild Wind*, she has a father, medical doctor by profession; mother, a younger sister and two elder brothers. Except them significant part of the autobiography tells us about her lover-turned husband Rudra and her friends. As the autobiography covers a significant time of her life, we can see the gradual change in her outlook and attitude to deal with the rest of the world. The biography minutely details the relationship among the family members providing enough incidents to look at the social and family structure. Her account gives enough peepholes to look at the position of women in her family in particular and the whole society in general. The relation between her father and mother, her

mother's status in the family, different familial code of conducts for herself and her brothers, her husband's outlook and the analysis of many other details makes it clear how latent patriarchy is operating in her family and society. Her sharp observation has already noticed the unequal and different status of her father and mother. She presents this unequal status of her mother and father in a very minute description. She writes:

> *"It had often happened that Ma would wash and fold Baba's clothes on the stand, clean and mop the room the whole day, open all the closed windows and doors so that fresh air and light could enter, move Baba's bed from the corner to near the window, and spread a clean sheet on it. She would then await Baba's return, hoping Baba would come, see and like her arrangements. Baba would come home." (Nasreen, 2006, p.253)*

The Male Supremacy can be directly traced in her family. The source of ultimate economic and household power is exercised by Nasreen's father. Her father exercises the rights and freedom in her family and deprives other with even the basic things. The mother in the family plays subordinating role. She lacks economic independence. She is made to depend on her husband to run the family. She does not have a 'room' of herself. Therefore, she does not have the privacy of her, which makes her completely to depend upon father. Taslima notices it even in her early age. Once she describes a small feast of her sister's birthday:

> *"That day too, the one who did not get to share even a single piece of Yasmin's cake was Ma. She had left the house in the afternoon to return only at dusk. In her hand was a brown paper packet, inside which was a red colored dress material for Yasmin. Ma was going to stitch a frilled frock for Yasmin herself. Having no money, she had, without telling anyone borrowed some from Hashem mama, and gone to Gaurahi Cloth House and bought three yards of the material." (Nasreen, p.9)*

The most submissive woman in the autobiography seems to be the author's mother. She is the greatest sufferer of patriarchy. She is culturally programmed to have an outlook determined by patriarchy. She accepts her submissive role as a universal rule. She is isolated. She does not share collective experience with any of the family member. She seems to be a mere shadow of her husband. In spite of extreme negligence by her husband, she is worried lest he is not after any other woman. Nasreen wants to get cure physically, aesthetically as well as socially in the infected life caused by the patriarchal society. Nasreen is confined and infected within the patriarchal woven society. To get freedom and cure from such problems she writes poems, articles, and novels against bad norms of her religion and culture. she says:

> *"I did not follow all the rules and command of my father and culture. I went to see the world which I had not got chance to see before. The world meant the dozens of different people on the streets, the houses and courtyards of neighbors, the holy Tulsi corner ritual, the evening incense, and the singing of kirtans with the accompanying music of the cybals." (Nasreen, p.41)*

Nasreen and her sister had been given limited space in the family. They both could not go outside alone if anything was to be done she had to take permission from her farther but her brothers were not in such rules, they were free to go anywhere outside where they like. Once a boy named Lutfer wrote a love letter to Taslima, after that she was kept strict by her father. She says, "I had to go school, escorted by guards. Borodada, grandfather was given the responsibility of escorting me to school in the morning, and taking me back home when school was over" (Nasreen, 2006, p.14). She believes that such types of boundaries limitations have been made for women because patriarchal society takes female as weak, emotional and so on. That is why she wants to be free from such things. The domination towards female is too much for her: she believes that superiority or authority is accorded in humanity but not to the sex. That is why she is not in a position to accept all the

doctrines and paths made for her rather she wants her thoughts herself. She is no one in her society that is why she wants to assert her identity as a female. For this, she is ready to blur the boundaries created for the female. She believes that superiority or authority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex because men also can be inferior not only women. Some women are superior to men. It does not mean that once there is a man he always becomes superior and perfect. It is the eyes of male dominated society, which always hegemonies people to think men good and women bad. She writes, "Both men and women can be editors. Some words have incorporated some unjustified gender distinctions which I do not want to use" (Nasreen, p.224). She does not believe on Allah, Rasoo or to believe on Allah, for her, is the work of mindless people. It is illogical to respect and pray the God. When Nasreen's mother prays the Allah she says, "Ma couldn't possibly have any brains, otherwise why did she believe in Allah Rsoo? If she did, why did she sit alone with Aman Kaka in the room and whisper under the pretext of giving him advice" (75)? It means she does not believe in God. Not to respect the god, she is against her religion. She takes cigarette, goes out of the house in the parks, watches movies, reads storybooks, recites poetry, and writes verses. "All third rate magazines carrying pictures were banned at home" (99). But, she does not do as her father's saying. When someone scolds her and asks to follow according to her father's command she would say, "Yes, he is my father. He is not me. My father and I are different we have different interest" (Naseren, p.154). She wears the pants prohibited by her father. She does not like to wear 'odhna' to cover her face but her parents scold her. She writes, "I felt ashamed to wear this extra cloth to cover my breast. To me, this was the proof that something was hidden behind it, something soft, something modest, something one could not talk about. Whether I wore 'odhna' or not, people knew I had grown up" (Naseren, p.123). So, she threw her 'odhna', which her father had covered her with. Writing letters to the boys, making love affairs, visiting outside park, such things were not allowed in her culture but she goes beyond that and does everything she prefers. She is in love with a man called Rudra who is a poet. She meets him several times in the Botanical garden, Canteen, and hotel. She goes with Rudra and lies she had gone to meet Chandana her friend. She writes poems, articles, and stories against patriarchal society.

Nasreen, wants to make herself free from the restrictions of her society that is why she not only crosses the boundaries of her culture but she also writes poems, articles against patriarchal society in her own magazine called *Shenjuti*. She has a friend called Chandana who also likes freedom and ready to deny her parents' suggestions and rules of society so both of them write against dominations. Nasreen thinks that even the dresses made to women make them difficult in working because dresses like' Sari, Odhna etc. are difficult to wear. It disturbs while working. She, in this way, does not like to wear such dresses. She likes to wear the comfortable dresses that do not disturb while wearing and working. She, that is why, wore jeans in spite of her father's prohibition. "Put the buttons or zip in front not on the side. Put loops. If I want to wear a belt I will" (Nasreen, 2006, p.549). And she encouraged her sister to wear pants. She says, "wearing jeans did not mean she would become a boy" (Nasreen, 2006, p.549). In this way, she refuses the traditional concept of dresses for woman and she requests other too to wear the dress of their own. Nasreen's mother asks her to pray the God; she refuses because she has no faith in god. Her mother several times asks her to pray the Allah. She also nags her daughter all the time to respect the God. And she believes that if there is no respect and prey for Allah, he will get angry and the days of joys will end and the days if sorrow will begin. Painful life, sorrow, sadness everything is the result of not obeying Allah according to her mother. That is why she asks her daughter to prey and respect the Allah. Her mother says, "What are all these you are saying Nasreen? You have lost your faith!" (Naseren, 2006, p.528).

Discussion

The patriarchy takes women as an object. The male members think it is his right to do whatever he pleases to do with the body of a woman. In the case of Taslima, the oppression of a woman is so extreme that it is at the level of violence and sexual harassment even in the public places. The females in Mulsim society suffer a lot in patriarchal society. Males treat them as the aliens. She writes that she is sexually harassed before the public. This is common in the society where female's position is not valued. She seeks help from the family and other friends in the society. However, it is vain. Instead of getting help and support from the family, everyone ignores her. In a patriarchal family or in society boy child is preferred than a girl child. Because woman is seen as an inferior sex, parents want to have a boy. Taslima mentions an example of extreme hatred for girl child. Taslima has a friend Chandana whom she loves very much. But there is a heart rendering story behind her birth. In this case, Chandana is a Buddhist. But no matter what the religion is, the extreme hatred is seen in every community. Taslima gives the account of many women in her hospital labor room where women's anxiety and fear of child's gender is much more than the fear of delivery. There are feasts and sweets when a boy is born but wails and cry when a girl is born. Taslima describes many incidents in the present autobiography. Women's inferior role in the society is culturally produced and reinforced. This gets ever stronger because the decisive role in producing and reinforcing them is played by male. As they control over every social institution they make it even stronger.

> *"However, if a daughter brought a complaint to Baba that her husband was beating her, Baba said, let him. Let the husband beat her, if he gave her a little daal and rice to eat from his earning, she should keep quiet and continue to look after her husband's household. This was the advice she was sent with. When a husband gave Talaq to his wife, and married for a second time, Baba was out to take away the husband's job." (Naseren, p.192)*

Women's biological role as a child bearer, household worker, and dependent on the husband's earning is reinforced in the aforementioned example. The author's father thinks the role of male and female is biologically determined. As a representative of patriarchal male, he boasts at earning money for his family. Similarly, the success to provide economic support to the family is seen as matter of pride. Not just because they earn money, they have right to oppress their wives.

FINDINGS

In a patriarchal ideology, good girls are those who do not violate the norms imposed by patriarchy. Lois Tyson writes, "It is patriarchy that will do the defining because both the roles are projections of patriarchal male desire: for example, the desire to own 'valuable' women suited to be wives and mothers, the desire to control women's sexuality so that men's sexuality cannot be threatened and the desire to dominate in all financial matter" (Naseren, p.90). According to this sexist category, Taslima is a "bad girl". She violates patriarchal sexual norms. She openly falls in a relationship with a poet Rudra. She lets it known by everyone in the family. Ironically, when her father makes extra marital affairs with Rajia, no one in the family calls him a "bad man". But when Taslima, as an adolescent girl falls in love with a man, she is called a "bad girl". In fact, women's feelings, perspective, and opinion do not count unless they are in tune with patriarchy. Consciously or unconsciously, women internalize that they are objects and their task is making their husbands pleased with their body. Of course, it is culturally programmed in their mind that they spent most of the time trying to find the way to please their husband. Taslima's mother tries to get attention of her husband by decorating herself with all the means at her disposal. The good girl is always talked about in the society. Lois Tyson writes, "To her are attributed all the virtues associated with patriarchal femininity and domesticity: she is modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing, and nurturing.

She has no needs of her own, for she is completely satisfied by serving the family. She is the angel in the family" (Nasreen, 2006, p.90). So we can say that in a patriarchal society and family Taslima's mother is a good girl. The individual identity of a woman in a patriarchal society is quite impossible. The man wants woman to be a part of his identity. Taslima secretly gets married with the poet Rudra. The moment they get married Rudra starts imposing rule over her. As mentioned earlier, patriarchy defines girls in two categories in terms of their sexual norms. The woman who breaks the patriarchal defined norms are called bad girl. Ironically, the man who sleeps with a bad girl is never called a bad boy. Lois Tyson writes, "We use the negative word slut to describe a woman who sleeps with number of men while we use the positive word stud to describe a man who sleeps with number of women. So the persistence of repressive attitudes toward women's sexuality is still visible in the language" (Naseren, p.91). Sex related ethics are more concerned with the women.

In Taslima's case, patriarchal norms are supported by the Islam religion. As Quran says, "God was declared male, and man was declared to be created in His likeness. Eve became the symbol of temptation and sin. The woman was consequently judged as a less likely candidate for salvation and an everlasting life in heaven than man" (Naseren, p.176). Young Taslima and her religious mother often get involved in discussion about the sexist presumption of Islam religion. After she gets frustrated and isolated in the family, Taslima's mother finds a "preacher" at Peerbaari. She goes there to listen to the sermon and sometime takes her daughters too. But sharp and educated Taslima finds the inconsistencies in Quran and debates with her mother. Taslima Nasreen in her text *Wild Wind* writes, "How can you accept you will not get the seventy-two nymphs in heaven, only your husband will, just because he is a man! If you are a witness in court, your sole witness will not do, two women witness are required. Yet a single man's witness will be acceptable, two men are not required" (Naseren, p.528). There are enough evidences that reinforce patriarchal values that undermine the women in Quran which Taslima brings forth while discussing with her mother. While discussing the rationale of Nabiji's getting married to six year old girl, she tries to convince that it is not justifiable action.

In case of Taslima, she has got married to an educated and learned poet, whose poetry advocates the equality of all kinds. His name was Rudra. Although she is married, she does not live in her in-law's house. Whenever she and Rudra want to meet, they two visit hotel or sometimes in Rudra's room. She does not inform her parents and takes all the decisions alone. She does not want to remain under the pressure and restrictions in the family. She repeatedly does not care about her religion or her social conduct. She thinks that patriarchal system makes woman weak and feeble; unhappy and restricted. Her husband Rudra turns out to be a hypocrite who just pretends to be a man of knowledge. He unveils his patriarchal self the moment his male pride is hurt. Taslima cannot go further in the relationship. She demands a divorce. But he thinks that she is her 'property' and can't go without his consent. "You are my lawfully wedded wife, you have to listen to whatever I say, come out, or I will call the police. No son of swine will be able to stop me" (Nasreen, 2006, p.655). Ultimately, she gets divorce and deserts her husband because she wants equality in her every steps of life. Had she been the traditional woman, she would have tolerated all the difficulties in her life thinking that they were her duty and religion, but she does not do so. She neither believes on her religion nor her social norms and values. In this way, Nasreen tries to recognize the female rights and to learn the social institution and personal power relation between the sexes. Naturally male and female are not given their particular and specified roles but it is the culture, which makes male and female different in every steps and stages. The right of equality and justice goes to both men and women. When we cannot get equality, we come to face domination and exploitation there will be the revolution.

5. Conclusion

The present research concludes that women are exploited and suppressed in the society where patriarchy rules in its highest point. Taslima Nasreen's autobiography *Wild Wind* exposes the oppression of patriarchy in an Islam family, which helps to understand that females have very pitiable and bitter experiences. They suffer a lot in a patriarchal society. On the surface, the book seems a mere documentation of the author's daily life along with her observation of the world around her, but a deeper analysis exposes it to be the testimony of the women' subjugation by patriarchy. The autobiography covers the life of Taslima from her early teenage to the adulthood. By exploring the life activities of Taslima Nasreen and her suffering, the research concludes that females are exploited and oppressed in most of the traditional societies. Muslim society takes the cover of Islam religion and in the name of God, Allah, women are subjugated and they suffer. The researcher read the autobiography minutely and analyzed it with feminist touch. Taslima not only details her everyday life but also observes the lives around her. Moreover, her minute detailing of the world around her, the relationship among the family members and her own personal life gives readers the peephole to look at patriarchal social structure. The autobiography cannot be read just as a first hand story of a controversial writer. It is a lively documentary of an orthodox society where every woman has to suffer the physical, mental, social, and economic oppression of patriarchy. The present autobiography is the representation of hundreds of other woman whose echoes are never heard nor tried to hear ever. Although the autobiography *Wild Wind* was banned right after its first publication in Bengali language, it arose the sensation all over the world. The blame was that the book contains the obscene content and its blasphemy. Above all the charge was that the book posed the challenge against God, social hierarchy, and ethics. The rationale put forward by the orthodox community for fatwa order against author itself proves that the book is exposing the inhuman oppression of the women in a patriarchal society. Thus, the book opens up the possibility of feminist reading of the text to unveil the oppression of patriarchy and to analyze the pitiable condition of women. The research dwells on the general agreed upon definition of patriarchy, its apparatus, functioning and tools. Furthermore, the research establishes how it is reinforced through many male dominated social institutions. Taking into account different ideas of feminism the research presents the general ideas on patriarchy. The researcher has analyzed the role of Islam in reinforcing the patriarchy in subjugating women. Giving the evidence of different women character and their collective experience of oppression, the researcher establishes that the autobiography exposes the tyrant patriarchy operating in Taslima's society and family. In the same way, the research presents the different social, political, and cultural institutions that shape and make the patriarchy stronger. Thus, while analyzing the autobiography *Wild Wind* from the perspective of Muslim feminism the researcher has found that the patriarchy is prevalent in the society and family of Taslima Nasreen. Though it seems a mere autobiography, the deeper analysis brings forth how patriarchy is operating in an Islam society. The male chauvinism rules until today by neglecting the roles of females in the society.

References:

[1] Badran. M, Feminism in Islam, London: One World Publication, (2008).

[2] Beauvoir. S. de, The Second Sex, London: Walflower Press, (1999).

[3] Eddouada. S, Implementing Islamic Feminism, Ed. Anitta Kynsilehto, Islamic Feminism: Current Perspective, Tampere: Juvenes, (2008).

[4] Falcon. L, The New Politics, Sydney: Black Swan Publication, (2001).

[5] Hussain. M. Z, Novels in Pakistan, Islamabad: Khuftar Publishing House, (2000).

[6] Islam. M. N, Islam and Women, Tortures on Women, Bangladesh: New Circle, (1991), 7-8.

[7] Kamth. V, A Selective Memory, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, (1998).

[8] Kynsilehto. A, Islamic Feminism: Current Perspective, Tampere: Juvenes, (2008).

[9] LeGates. M, Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society, New York: Routletdge Publication, (2001).

[10] Millet. K, Sexual Politics: New York: Garden City Press, (1970).

[11] Mir-Hosseini. Z, Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism Ed. Anitta Kynsilehto, Islamic Feminism: Current Perspective, Tampere: Juvenes, (2008).

[12] Mukhopadhya. S, Reading Taslima Nasreen and her Wild Wind, The Critical Review 4.1, (2004), 34-37.

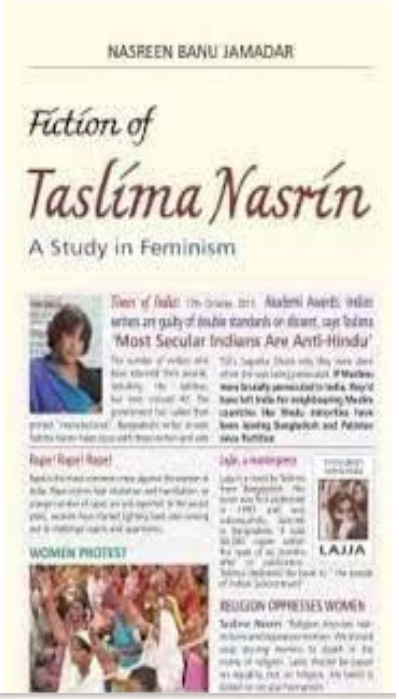
[13] Nasreen. T, Wild Wind, New Delhi: Shristi Publication Distributors, (2006).

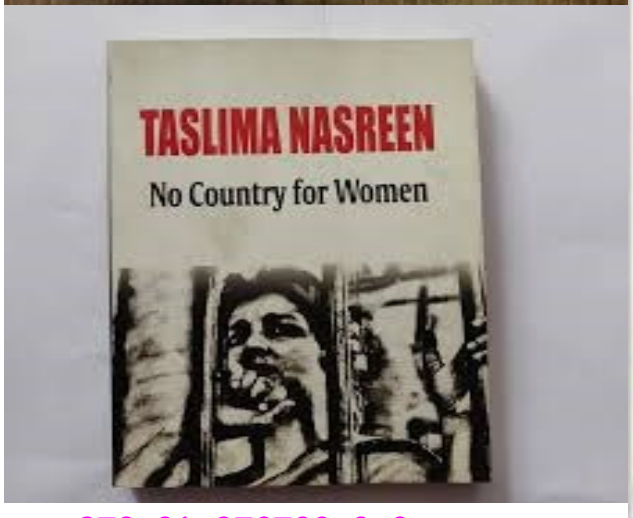
[14] Satpathy. G, Women and Sexuality, New Delhi: Orient Longman, (2000).

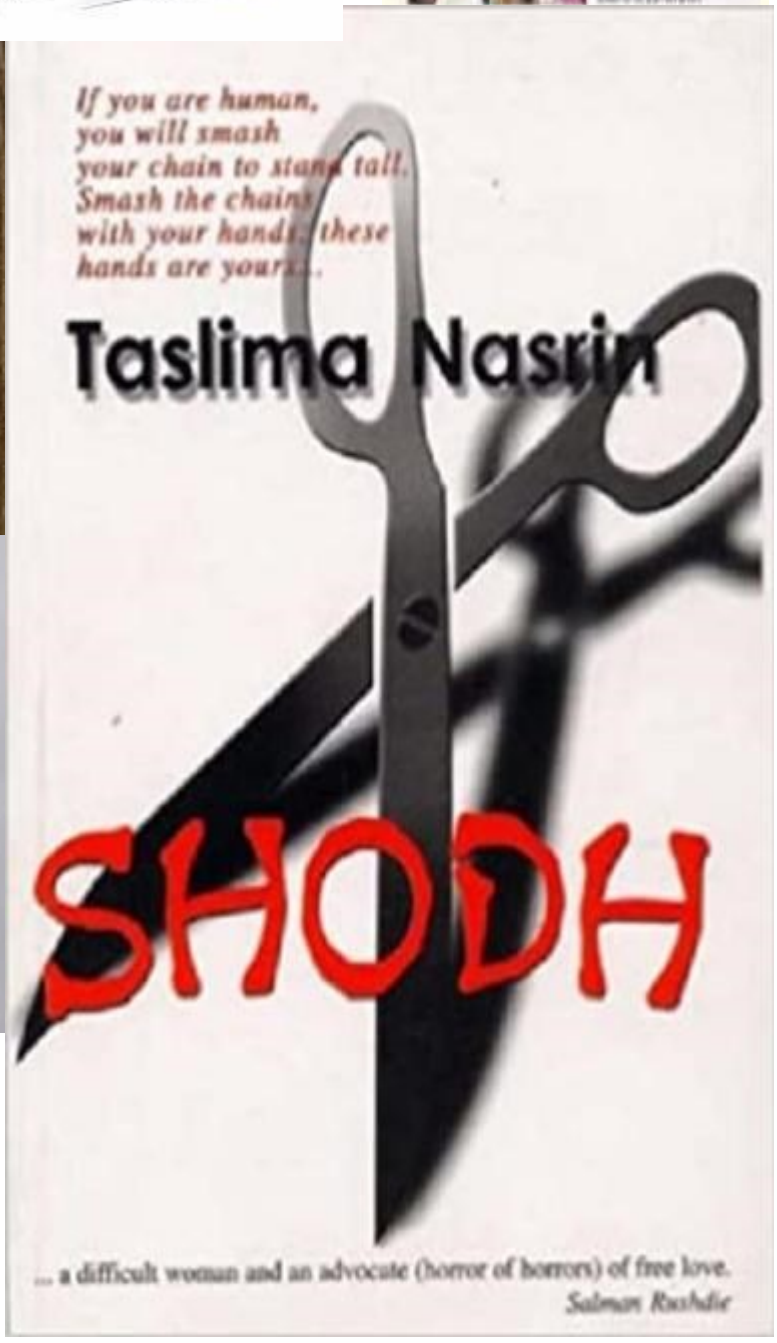
[15] Tyson. L, Critical Theory Today, New York: Routledge, (2006).

[16] Walby. S, Theorising Patriarchy, New York: Basil Blackwell, (1990).

[17] Wood. M. W, The History of Feminism, Paris: new wave Publication, (2001).






If you are human,
you will smash
your chain to stand tall.
Smash the chains
with your hands, these
hands are yours...
Taslima Nasrin
SHODH
... a difficult woman and an advocate (horror of horrors) of free love.
Salman Rushdie

978-81-972782-8-0

ISBN 978-81-972782-8-0
9 788197 278280